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SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH IDENTIFIED SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS AT TWO-YEARS-OLD: VOICES OF EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

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SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH IDENTIFIED SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS AT TWO-YEARS-OLD: VOICES OF EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

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Contents

Abstract:

Communication and language skills are essential for children to access learning opportunities and the curriculum. Existing research has highlighted that some children are living in England who start school without the necessary level of communication and language skills, to access the curriculum fully. Previous research has demonstrated that early identification of a speech, language and communication need (SLCN), is key to providing targeted interventions, to reduce the impact caused by these additional needs. However, changes within policy have created challenges for early years practitioners in identifying SLCN and providing support for those children. The current study explores the experiences of early years practitioners, as they navigate through the current statutory and non-statutory guidance, to identify, assess and support children's development. The study utilised a narrative inquiry approach, through unstructured conversational interviews, to explore participants' experiences. The fourteen interviews conducted involved fifteen participants from two geographical locations. A synthesised approach to analysis was taken, using both constructivist grounded theory and narrative framework approaches that provided an analytical framework. Findings suggest that the level of external support available to practitioners through education and health authorities varies according to location. Assessment arrangements through the primary tools used to assess children and the external pressure to collect data from assessments were discussed as a pressure point for participants, that at times, impacted on the reliability of the assessments conducted. These findings could add to the existing body of knowledge, by providing insight of assessment processes and the differences in assessments from setting to setting within geographical locations. The findings could raise questions on the validity of the assessment tool gathered from local and national data to create an overview of children's developmental levels nationally.

Statement

I confirm that the work in this thesis is original except when acknowledging the work of others that conforms to referencing conventions. The work has not been submitted for any other academic award. The work was carried out to conform to the regulations of the University of Lincoln. All views expressed in this thesis are my own.

Signed

Nyree-Anne Nicholson

01 June 2020

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Abbreviations and Glossary

Abbreviation	Description
BTMF	Birth to Three Matters Framework
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Groups
CGFS	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (
CPD	continuous professional development
DCS	Director of Children's Services
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ELDP	Early Language Development Programme (ELDP)
ELVS	Early Language in Victoria Study
Early year's sector	Relates to all settings who provide care for children from birth to seven years old.
Early year's practitioner	Any person who support's children in a professional capacity within the early years sector.
ECM	Every Child Matters
ECaT	Every Child a Talker
EHCP	Education and Health Care Plan
EIF	Education Inspection Framework
ELG	Early Learning Goals (listed in the Early Years Foundation Stage)
ELLP	Early Language Lead Practitioner
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum
EYFP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYC	Early Years Coordinators
EYTS	Early Years Teacher Status
GLF	Graduate Leader Fund
GSCEs	General Certificate of Secondary Education
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LA	Local Authority
LD	Typically Developing language
LEYT	Local Early Year's Team
LMCS	Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS)
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
N-SLI	nonspecific language impairment (N-SLI).
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
Practitioners	Early year's professionals
PLS-4	Preschool Language Scale
PVI	Private Voluntary or Independent provision
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RCSLT	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEED	Study of Early Education and Development
SENC	Special Educational Needs Coordinators
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Abbreviation	Description
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
SENDCoP	Special Educational Needs Code of Practice
SEYT	Specialist Early Years Teachers
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Need
SLD	Speech and Language Development
SLI	Specific Language Impairment
SLT	Speech and Language Therapy Services
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programmes
STA	Standards and Teaching Authority
Tapestry	Online development tracking programme used by early year's practitioners

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this study, I consider the perceptions and experiences of early years practitioners of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The Bercow Review (2008; 2018) drawing on research by Norbury et al. (2016) highlighted that language disorders affect 10 per cent of children and young people and are the most common childhood disorders. Two earlier studies, Locke et al. (2002) and Law et al. (2011) and highlighted that in some areas of the United Kingdom, up to 50 per cent of children experience an SLCN. The Centre for Social Justice (2013) highlighted that in areas of England, some children are starting school without the level of communication required to access the curriculum fully. More recently, a study by St. Claire et al. (2019) found that children with SLCN were more likely to experience difficulties in social interaction and in emotional development with decreased ability to self-regulate their emotions. The Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) report highlighted that communication and language attainment levels at age five were associated with demographic and home environment factors, rather than quality early years provision (Melhuish & Gardiner, 2020). However, early years practitioners are responsible for the identification, assessment and support of children's communication and language development under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum (DfE, 2012b).

Research has shown that early identification and intervention are essential to support children, to help reduce long-term effects of speech-language and communication needs (SLCN) (Ukoumunne et al. 2012). The critical period for language development is estimated to be 18-36 months (Kuhl et al. 2005). However, research has shown that there are children who once they have been identified as having an additional language need, enter twelve months of 'watchful waiting' to see whether the additional need self-corrects within that time (Nelson et al. 2006; Lawrence & Bateman, 2013).

Research has also identified that there appears to be a lack of specific training for early years practitioners, both within the qualifications they take as part of their professional development and specialised training for communication and language development (Hall, 2005). Research has identified that the lack of opportunities to develop skills in understanding and recognising typical[1] language development and atypical language development has created situations where practitioners are not confident in identifying additional language needs in children (Dockrell & Marshall, 2015; Hall, 2005; Prelock et al. 2008; Nicholson & Palaiologou, 2016).

The current research, therefore, explores the experiences of early years practitioners as they assess, identify and support children who may experience speech, language and communication needs. The purpose of the current study was not to speak for the practitioners or the children they supported, instead to illuminate their individual experiences as they navigated the early years curriculum the internal and external factors that impacted on how they perceived their role as assessors, identifiers and supporters of children's language development. Each experience conveyed through a conversational interview offered an insight into how the practitioner interpreted the events they were reflecting on. The aim was to gain insight into what it was like for the early years practitioners as they grappled with a range of factors that ultimately impacted on how they perceived their roles, the early years sector and the external services for whom they turned to for support. Therefore, the following research question was formulated: What are early years practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs, in early years settings.

Through an interpretivist paradigm, I attempted to interpret the experiences and stories told by the participants. Throughout the study, I encouraged

[1] The term 'typical or normative' language development requires further discussion and is explored in 2.9

participants to engage in a dialogue in the process of co-authorship (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010) discussed in 4.3.3. Through the experiences of this small group of early years practitioners, I hope some of the key findings of this research will create further dialogue.

In this section I have provided an initial justification within the literature for the current research. The following section explores my position as a researcher and provides an insight into my interest into speech language and communication needs in children from two years old. This chapter also identifies a brief political and educational overview to help position the current study. The chapter also explores the aims and objectives of the current study, identifies the limitations and addresses the potential contribution to knowledge this thesis sought to address.

1.1 Background positioning the study

The focus of this study is the early years sector and the experiences of early years practitioners of navigating national and local policy. The early years sector is influenced by government policy relating to the organisation and regulation of the sector that begins in national government policy and legislation and filters down to local government control (see 2.4). Policy documents set out the Statutory Welfare Requirements of the sector that places stipulation on the qualification levels of practitioners and adult: child ratios (DfE, 2017a). Government funding formulas and have impacted the sustainability of the early years sector that have also impacted the time and resources that early years practitioners have to support children. Non-statutory guidance provides information on assessment (DfE, 2008b & 2012b). These factors influence how early years practitioners conduct their professional role and therefore impact on how they understand their experiences.

The focus on speech, language and communication needs has been a focal point for research for some time (Allen, 2011; Bercow, 2008; Bercow, 2018; Tickell, 2011). Research has demonstrated the impact of a speech, language

and communication need to children and young peoples' long-term outcomes (Law, 2009) with an increasing focus on the importance of early language development and intervention (Bercow, 2018). Therefore, government policy concerning early years education has increasingly focused on communication and language. The Early Years Foundation Stage, (EYFS), recognised the importance of language development, to children's overall attainment since its introduction in 2008 (DfE, 2008b). The importance of communication and language to the overall achievement of children was also evidenced in the later release of EYFS with identification of communication and language as a prime area of learning (DfE, 2012b). It is a statutory requirement that children within the birth to five-year age range, attending any early years setting, are assessed and measured against Early Learning Goals (ELG) set within the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) to monitor their development. The increased attention on assessment provided insight into how children develop and thus posed challenges to early years practitioners, working with children of this age range.

Introducing three prime areas of learning in the 2012 release of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b), required practitioners to focus attention on physical, personal, social and emotional development and communication and language, for children under two years old (Hillman & Williams, 2015). The ideology was that these prime areas were the essential foundation blocks for children's overall development. The intention was that the additional focus on these areas within the early years setting would provide early years practitioners with opportunities to identify gaps in the individual child's development. The focus meant that more targeted interventions could be introduced to reduce the chance of a child's development from becoming delayed (Tickell, 2011). The focus on young children's development in the prime areas was part of the campaign to close the gap in attainment, where children are expected to have achieved a good level of development, defined by achieving at least the expected level in these three prime areas (Tickell, 2011). Although the gap has showed some improvement in those children attaining good levels of development and those attaining emerging levels of attainment or below (Andrews et al. 2017), there are still children who are starting school without

the necessary level of communication required to access the curriculum fully. The attainment levels of children are assessed both before and after entering formal education when the child is five years old (Norbury et al. 2016).

There have been several challenges facing the early years workforce in recent years that have impacted on how practitioners support young children. These have included funding cuts and changes to education policy (Morton, 2017). For example, there has been an increase in the number of children attending early years provision and an increase in the number of hours that they attend, due to the increased 30-hour government funding (DfE, 2018a). The increase in children attending early years provision has caused additional strain on individual settings financial sustainability, and ability to meet the individual needs of the children in their care (Gaunt, 2018b). Also, cuts to speech and language therapy services have impacted the support an early years setting can procure on behalf of the child (Long et al. 2018).

Normative communication and language development are difficult to define concerning chronological age (Bishop et al. 2016). However, the education system is shaped around chronological ages of children as they progress through the early years foundation stage, into key stage 1 through to key stage 4 (see 2.5.2). Research has shown that speech, language and communication needs are also difficult to define (Bishop et al. 2016). The lack of specified communication and language training (see 3.6), besides assessment challenges (see 2.8) have created potential challenges for early years practitioners. These challenges are coupled with the sector experiencing high staff turnover thought to be due to increased workloads, low pay and questions over sector sustainability. As a result experienced, qualified staff are leaving the sector leaving less qualified and confident staff to assess, identify and support children (Gaunt, 2018c; McAlees, 2019).

1.1 Positioning the researcher

My interest in speech and language development evolved over the past fifteen years through personal and professional interests, and I have followed a thread throughout my studies that have led me to this point. My professional role as an early years practitioner working specifically as a child-minder in an area classified by the local authority as deprived, provided opportunities to work with children experiencing speech, language and communication needs. I experienced first-hand the impact that speech, language and communication needs can have on all aspects of the child's development, and as a result, I was invited to take part in a pilot programme known as Every Child a Talker (ECaT) (DCSF 2008a).

More recently, in my professional capacity, I work with early years practitioners and hear their experiences of supporting children experiencing speech, language, and communication needs. These factors: my professional, personal and research experiences have led me to the current study where I hoped to capture the experiences of early years practitioners as they navigated through policy and sector sustainability in their quest to support the children for whom they cared.

1.2 Relevance of prior experiences

As described in 1.2, my professional position as an early years practitioner and then as an early years lecturer gave me experiences I could draw on to communicate with the participants in the current study. This prior experience meant that I had some understanding of the participant's professional life. This prior experience helped me to connect with the participants and aided the current research as the participants appeared to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with someone who understood the sector and some challenges they experienced enabling me to know when to probe further and when not to. Anderson et al. (2007) discussed insider experiences as aiding

the reliability of the study as I could assess the plausibility of the shared experiences. Somekh and Lewin (2011) discussed insider knowledge as a basis to develop trust through a shared understanding of professional vocabulary that enabled the conversations with participants to flow unhindered by interruptions to explain specific jargon. I define insider and outsider positionality in section 4.13.3. However, briefly, insider positionality is mentioned here to explain that the research does not begin from an objective standpoint.

Conversely, I argued throughout the thesis that my professional and personal experiences are essential in understanding and interpreting the participants' stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The design of the current study aimed to connect with participants to help share experiences naturally. Bickman and Rog (2009) posited the view that eliminating bias is impossible from social science research, and therefore, the role of the research is to ensure that the bias is used productively.

I acknowledge that bringing my own experiences to research is not without challenge. My own experiences shaped how I designed the study, and this could have narrowed my focus. Pillow (2003) highlighted that the researcher bears an ethical responsibility to the participants through the research process to ensure that the authenticity of the participants' voices is maintained. Pillow (2003) clarified that the researcher's positionality and beliefs could be dissonant with how the data are interpreted. As acknowledged, my prior experiences shaped the study design; however, to retain the authenticity of the participants' voices in the sharing of their experiences, several steps were taken. Throughout the research process, I kept a reflective log (see Appendix C), the reflective logs enabled me to reflect before and after the interviews and during the analysis process. I also took several steps to retain the authenticity of the participants' experiences by sending the interview transcript to each participant to confirm before I used the data in the analysis. I invited participants to explore how their data were interpreted to ensure that I had interpreted their experiences in the way

they were shared. This process provided opportunities to assess and reassess my understanding of the experiences that the participants shared. Initially, I had hoped that the study would bring opportunities to explore ways of supporting early years practitioners to support children with speech, language and communication needs. This is still my hope; however, as I have progressed through the research process and stepped backed from my professional experiences, I gained the opportunity to hear the voices of the participants. The voices of the fifteen early years practitioners and engaging with their experiences through this doctoral study provided new perspectives that I had not previously considered. Researching the participants' experiences within a doctoral research context have deepened my understanding of how child language developed is assessed and the dilemmas that these assessments can pose for the participants and for children in ways I had not entirely conceived before undertaking this study. I reflect upon my developed understanding within the concluding chapter of this thesis.

1.3 Aims and approaches of the current study

The aim of the study was to investigate early years practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs, in early years settings. The following questions were designed to address the research aim:

1. What are the experiences of early years practitioners in relation to the identification process of speech language and communication needs in two-year-old children?
2. What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are assessed?
3. What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are supported?

I also wanted to compare the experiences of the early years practitioners from different counties to investigate any potential similarities and differences in the shared experiences from a geographical perspective. Therefore, the following question was added:

4. What are the differences and similarities in experiences between early years practitioners in two different counties?

As a result of conducting the pilot study, I realised that the participants appeared to respond to questions by providing examples of stories that emphasised their perspectives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed that telling stories of events is an individuals' attempt to understand different aspects of their world. Therefore, a narrative inquiry methodological approach was adopted to explore the experiences and the meaning of the experience from an early years practitioners' perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, the research question was amended, and I moved from looking specifically at perceptions to investigating the early years practitioners' experiences. This change was also reflected within the study design as I changed from conducting semi-structured interviews to conducting conversational interviews where the research responds to the points raised by the participant (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Our conversations became more natural as I responded to the points made by the participants and this enabled co-authored approach to the interview and provided a platform for authentic rich data to emerge (Roulston, 2012). However, it is acknowledged that although the interviews were co-authored, the participants perspectives were their own. The flexibility of the conversational approach to the research allowed for an individualist response to the participants. The participants were co-authors in the respect of what they chose to talk about and the direction that the interviews took, thus creating an interactive dialogue. Therefore, the approach centred on a narrative inquiry methodology designed to elicit the sharing of lived experiences of the practitioners through the stories that they told.

A combination of narrative analysis through a structured analytical framework and constructivist grounded theory (see 1.1.1) approaches were used in

analysing the data. I adopted a narrative hermeneutic approach to the study, and tried to understand and interpret the shared experience as the participants understood their experience (Ritzer, 2005; Howell, 2013). The analysis of data through a series of stages (see Appendix L) that provided ways to:

> make the familiar strange and the strange familiar; prompt new insight or at least erode a lack of understanding; shine a light differently on things" (Selbie & Clough, 2005: 115-116).

Through looking at the data through various stages of analysis, I could take a step back from the data and view it in different ways. I extracted stories relating to the children, that emphasised the early years practitioners' experiences of identifying, assessing and supporting the children. I also extracted stories that provided insight into each early years practitioners' journey into the early years sector. Analytical stages helped create a set of themes explored alongside narrative stories. The two approaches helped to build a conceptual bridge to link between narrative inquiry and constructivist grounded theory that helped to draw out the richness of the storied accounts while also capturing the nuances of the shared experiences (Lal et al. 2012).

1.4 My journey to Foucault

The outline of the thesis in section 1.7 explains the order of the study in which the study is presented. However, I feel it is necessary at this point to explain my story concerning how I began to study Foucault and his observations and how this ultimately shaped the study.

While I had heard of Foucault and touched very superficially on some of his ideas, I had not studied any of his work in detail. Towards the final stages of writing up my findings, I realised that I needed to analyse the meaning on a deeper level. I began to explore ideas for a conceptual framework as a lens through which to view the findings. I wanted the framework to provide ways of making the findings, which at this juncture had become very familiar to me, strange (Manny, 2016). Richardson (2001) discussed this process as a

metaphorical prism that when turned, provides an alternative perspective, or way of seeing.

I began reading around number of different philosophical perspectives, however, when I came to Foucault's work, I found some themes that resonated with aspects of the literature review and my axiological beliefs but more specially to the experiences expressed by the practitioners. It was at this point that I began to review my research and re-examine earlier preconceptions that led to an uncomfortable realisation that I was part of the structures Foucault discussed concerning perpetuating normativity and engaging in surveillance. I discuss in section 7.5 that I had expected to find a clear justification for early intervention. However, my views changed dramatically and forced me to re-examine my practice and values in relation to how children develop and how this is ultimately assessed. Ball (2012: 88) termed this a process in "re-writing myself." I provide an explanation of this process into Foucault at this junction, to justify why Foucault does not feature throughout the thesis and why applying Foucault's observations to this study at the final stages was powerful in achieving the final result.

1.5 Justification and limitations

The current study is important because the focus of the literature highlighted early identification and intervention for SLCN is thought to benefit children's long-term outcomes (Bishop et al. 2012; Lindsay et al. 2010; Wankoff, 2011) illustrated in Chapter 3. Early years practitioners are in a unique position to identify and assess two-year-old children's language development with SLCN, however, as discussed within Chapter's 2 and 3, early years practitioners face several challenges concerning how language development is defined and assessed. The changing landscape of the early years sector has shaped political and societal views on the place of early years provision within the educational community (see 2.4 & 0). Political influences on policy and funding have changed the role and expectations of the early years practitioner to the extent that the sector has experienced sustainability challenges (Ceeda, 2014). High staff turnover and low recruitment in the

sector are thought to be attributed to low pay and increasing workload allocations (Gaunt, 2018c; McAlees, 2019). The increased demands on early years practitioners' time is a factor concerning the identification, assessment and support of SLCN. Funding cuts to government services such as education and health have affected children with potential SLCN (Kelly et al. 2018; Longfield, 2019).

This study sought to hear the voices of the early years practitioners as they shared their experiences of working in the early years sector to identify, assess, and support children. The study reflects on the experiences of the early years practitioners as they grappled with policy, their values that at times were at odds with the situations they sometimes found themselves in when trying to support the children in their care. The study considers the efficacy of the assessment tools available to the early years practitioners and the perceived tensions between the statutory and non-statutory national government and local authority requirements.

This study has limitations discussed in Chapter 4 and 7 of this thesis. However, at this juncture, it is important to highlight the study is a small-scale study designed to hear the voices of a small sample of early years practitioners with specific experience of working with two-year-old children with identified SLCN. Due to the small-scale of the study, the results are not generalisable to the whole early years sector. The study aimed to highlight the specific examples of the fifteen participants in the current study, to provide insight into their experiences of working in a sector during times of austerity and change and how these factors may help them reflect on their perceptions of professional identity (Clandinin & Roseik, 2007).

1.6 Contribution to knowledge

Although studies have explored the early years practitioners' perceptions of speech, language and communication needs, the focus has varied from the current study. A doctoral study by Blackburn (2014: 142) explored "views, understandings and reported practices of practitioners and parents concerning SLCN in the EYFS" and how the practitioners implemented "policy relating to early identification, assessment and intervention for young children's SLCN." Blackburn's (2014) study utilised a questionnaire research method and received 64 approaches. Blackburn's (2014) study differed to the current study by exploring all children under five and the methodological choices that were made. Alternative studies have shared aspects of the current study. For example, the identification of SLCN was investigated by evaluating the efficacy of alternative assessment methods that practitioners use (Seager & Abbot-Smith, 2017). However, this study provides originality in that it sought to explore the lived experiences of practitioners of assessing, identifying and supporting two-year-old children with identified SLCN.

The current study addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of early years practitioners of the identification, assessment and support of two-year-old children with identified SLCN. The study provides insight into some of the challenges that practitioners encounter in trying to balance statutory and non-statutory guidance while supporting children to achieve expected levels of development.
The contributions to knowledge can be summarised as:

- Understanding the challenges faced by practitioners in assessing children's development using the EYFS (DFE, 2012b).
- Understanding the impact and value of training in supporting and underpinning practitioners' knowledge and understanding of language development.
- The need to align the links between research and policy on language development levels to support cohesion between early years practices and speech and language services.

- Understanding the role of data and how data-driven practices may increase pressure and compromise the integrity of the data collected.
- Understanding the value of external support available for early years practitioners to access for advice, training and guidance across all local authorities to reduce a postcode lottery for support services.
- Understanding the drive to maintain normativity through expected levels of development.
- Acknowledging that surveillance provides multifaceted layers that can provide either support or constraint. Practitioners need to be consciously aware of both sides of surveillance and their legal and moral responsibility towards supporting children.
- Understanding the structures that influence practitioners to self-survey their own actions against prescribed criteria that aids the overall agenda of controlling normativity.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

The introduction chapter has explored my personal, professional justification for conducting this study. I provided a background to the current research to help position the current study and explored the political influences that have shaped the early years sector and set the stage of the current research. The current study's aims and objectives were established with an overview of how the project progressed throughout the research process. I identified the chosen methodology and analytical process. The current position has been outlined concerning the early years sector and the potential challenges early years practitioners could face when identifying, assessing and supporting two-year-old children with identified SLCN to justify the importance of the current study. I identified the contribution to knowledge that the current study brings.

Chapters 2 and 3 summarised the literature relating to the current study. Chapter 2 that focused on the political, societal influences on the development of the early years sector that have helped to shape the current

discourse of early years practice. The career paths of early years practitioners were examined to provide a background context for the practitioners involved in the current study and demonstrates the connections that impact on the practitioners. Practitioners' career paths were reviewed to provide a background context for the practitioners involved in the current research. Chapter 3 focused specifically on speech, language and communication development and needs. The chapter identified how SLCN can be considered a special educational need under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SENDCoP) (DfE, 2014 updated 2015). The chapter explored the challenges associated with the identification and assessment of SLCN and the internal and external support structures that may aid the early years practitioner in supporting SLCN. The chapter concluded with an overview of the impact SLCN can have to children's long-term development to provide further justification for the current research.

Chapters 4 identified the journey I took as a researcher in exploring my own epistemological and ontological beliefs that helped to form my philosophical stance that underpinned and shaped this study. The chapter identified the original research aims and objectives that through conducting a pilot study, I was able to reformulate to capture the experiences of the early years practitioners through narratives. The chapter explained the refocused aims leading to refining research questions. The data collection process was also refined and explained throughout with thorough ethical consideration.

Chapter 5 detailed the findings from the study. The chapter is divided into two main sections: normalisation and accountability control measures that focus on the policy processes that appeared to project a normalisation agenda to children's development levels through accountability procedures. The first section identified the participants' experiences of identification and assessment in the current study. The section explored how assessments are used internally and externally to the early years settings as a process of attempting to guide children towards expected levels of development through accountability measures. The second section explored the participants' experiences of the internal and external prioritisation, organisation and

deployment of support resources and services available when a child has been identified with an SLCN.

Chapter 6 identified the conceptual framework of the current study that provides a lens through which the themes identified within Chapter 6 are explored. The chapter aimed to explore the findings of this study to identify deeper meaning to “make the familiar strange” and uncover a more in-depth understanding of the findings (Mannay, 2016). The professional identity of the practitioners is explored through Foucault’s (1972) ideas of discourse formation. The chapter identified and explored the normalisation processes as they relate to the current thesis and concludes with how Foucault’s conceptualisation of surveillance can be applied to the current research. The conclusion and implications for future research are examined in Chapter 7.

Chapter 2: Political, societal influences on the development of the early years sector

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to explore political and societal influences on the development of the early years sector. The chapter begins by discussing what it means to be a child through evolving concepts that have been shaped by political, societal and scientific influences that effected the perceptions of child and childhood. It briefly examines the changing face of the early years sector that can be seen through changing policy, representing the various political viewpoints at each point of the evolutionary process. The changes in perceptions that focused on the early years sector as solely caregivers to the transition and recognition of practitioners as caregivers and educators are evaluated and explored.

The chapter charts the political influences through the changing governments beginning with New Labour (1997-2010), to the Conservative-Liberal Democrats Coalition government (2010-2015) to the Conservative government (2015-present). It briefly explores each government's approach to shaping the early years sector to provide a context that represents the participants illuminated experiences within the current study. The section will explore how political influences specifically relate to how children's development is viewed and assessed politically and socially, and the effect on the relationships of early years practitioners as they seek to support children.

This discussion gives an insight into whom the early years practitioners are by concentrating on career routes into the sector, practitioners' skills within the sector, and the pay and conditions within the sector. The section also explores the experiences and professional learning opportunities of early years practitioners and will be referred to from this point as practitioners. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the current and historic early years curriculum adopted to help the government track child

development rates from birth to five and ensure that all children are ready to start school at the expected level of development. The organisation of the curriculum is investigated and how normative development definitions are used to underpin how speech and language development are defined and evaluated.

2.2 What does it mean to be a child?

This study explored the experiences of practitioners of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs. Concepts of what a child is and what it means to be a child are central in positioning this research in the wider focus of understanding practitioners' roles of supporting children in cultural and political contexts. The section will first define the terms ‘childhood’ and ‘child’ to offer a context for the research.

The societal perspective of the purpose of childhood is complex, diverse and ideologically bound within socio-demographic and cultural groups that defines childhood and what it means to be a child (Bentley, 2005). Ideological perspectives are beliefs and values held by individuals and relate to culture, religion and politics (Berger, 2018). Ideological perspectives shape how society perceives events leading to social constructs of childhood (Prout & James, 2005). Shared beliefs and values influence how individuals perceive events and contexts to create popular or dominant ways of thinking and create shared ideological perspectives (Berger, 2018).

Childhood, according to Prout and James (2005: 56), is “an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted.” Therefore, Prout and James (2005) concluded that each culture defines childhood according to the values and beliefs of the prevailing cultural views. Ergo childhood is a social construction that has different meanings to different cultures. Childhood is challenging to define within contemporary England due to the ever-changing landscape of different cultures that make up the demographics of current day society (Gidley at al.

2018: 21). Multiple cultures are present within England with a multitude of variations of cultural traditions and expectations (Moore, 2011). Therefore, a universal societal definition of childhood is problematic. Subsequently, the lack of a specific definition of childhood leads to ambiguities in how a child is defined.

Similar to definitions of childhood, the concept of a child is a complex social construction that changes with contextual and cultural influences (Bentley, 2005). Therefore, there are multiple factors that contribute to definitions of a child. For example, biological age is a universal measurement that can help to define what it means to be a child (Bjorklund, 2016). Similarly, Plastow (2018: 4) illustrated that childhood stages are also characterised by age, providing "arbitrary divisions" between each age and developmental stage. Likewise, Plastow (2018) further clarified that the ages and stages of development within legal documentation are subject to cultural and political evolutionary changes. Thus, Plastow (2018: 4) concluded that a child's position within society is ambiguous and dependent upon conflicting legal and moral perspectives. Societal views of the child and the definitions of what it means to be a child are not always congruent.

Children's lives are dictated and shaped by adults to assure the child's best interests are supported, and therefore, childhood is seen and shaped through adult perspectives (Jones & Welch, 2018). Adults created the social world children inhabit and influenced the direction of children's lives through education and established developmental norms. Developmental norms or normative development are definitions proposed by adults to characterise the expected developmental skills children learn at different biological ages (Levine & Munsch, 2018) (see 2.2). The adult role in shaping the construct of childhood and what it means to be a child is significant to the current research as the focus of the research is supporting children with SLCN. Needs in this sense are defined by the support that children may require to help them achieve within normative ranges (DfE, 2015). The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the child defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 suggesting that anyone older than this age is

considered an adult (Unicef, 1989). The education system (see 2.5.2) provided a framework through which a child in England progressed through to adulthood. Concerning this thesis, the primary focus are two-year-old children will discussions focusing on how speech and language development can affect children through until adulthood.

This section has highlighted perspectives of the terms ‘child’ and ‘childhood’ and showed how these terms position children within the current research. Sociological and biological definitions of childhood were discussed, with the biological definition used to provide context for the current study. The section established that the lack of a clear childhood definition contributed to ambiguities about how a child is defined. Definitions of a child contribute to the current study through decisions about how to coordinate and organise children's education and care. The following section explores the role of education in shaping children’s development from a historical perspective to the present day.

2.3 Education and care versus education or care

For this thesis, the early years sector applies to all care and educational provision for children up to five years old (DCSF, 2008b; DfE, 2012b). The development of early years provision changed over time because of the changes in society and political influences. Historically, David (1993) considered the primary role of early childhood provision to be care rather than education. Likewise, Gammage (2006) considered that one of the primary goals of early childhood provision was to foster attachments and provide care. Political discourse changed with research into the benefits of early years provision to children’s attainment (Gammage, 2006). An example of the change in political discourse was evident in the release of the Rumbold Report (DfES,1990) that advocated for the distinction that early childhood provision should contain both elements of care and education. The Rumbold Report also emphasised that all adults working with children were ‘teachers’ and therefore did not need a formal teaching qualification. The Rumbold Report was an early attempt to break down barriers between qualified

teachers and less-qualified practitioners in order to highlight the teaching aspect in both professionals and recognise the importance of the practitioners' position.

Policy changes reflected the shift in ideological perspectives. The Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act (1948) made regulation with the local health authority a requirement for all early years providers (Figure 1). The goal was to provide guidelines for minimum care standards supported by local authority inspection (Galloway, 1949). However, levels of care were not strictly regulated, and unregistered casual child caring arrangements continued to occur. The Seebohm Report (Secretaries of State, 1968) recommended creating boundaries around the different services provided within the local authority, to ensure “more effective family and community services could be provided” (Spray & Jowett, 2012: 2). Changes led to the creation of social service departments and transference of childcare regulation to social services in 1971 (Spray & Jowett, 2012).

The Children Act 1989 superseded the Nurseries and Child-Minders Regulation Act (1948). The Childminding and Day Care Regulations 1991 followed making social services responsible for registering and monitoring early years providers (The Childminding and Day Care Regulations, 1991). The choice of social services as the regulator for the early years reflected the government view that the role of early childhood provision was one of care rather than education. The government instructed social services to regulate all areas of provision including education and care (Baldock, 2013). The directive was problematic because of the primary focus of social services for ensuring the care and well-being of young children. Many social workers reported struggling with supporting educational development (Baldock, 2013). The struggle highlighted the dichotomous status of early years provision for under-fives as providers of education and care.

The regulator for educational provision was the local education authority and focussed on the academic development of children (Bennett & Desforges, 1991). Regulation of the early years sector by social services and education

by the local authority, could highlight that the government projected the view that education and care were separate (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Bertram and Pascal (2001: 7) explained how the setup and organisation of provision depended upon “separate systems of funding, provider responsibilities, setting type, admission, programmes, regulation, inspection, staffing and training”. This organisation created a split between the two ideological perspectives as either care-focused or education-focused. Introducing early years regulation represented the changing view that childcare provision was essential and required political attention (see Figure 1 for a diagrammatical representation).

Figure 1 The Evolution of early years sector

Political attention shaped early years discourse from a purely care-centred focus to an education and care-centred emphasis. The following section explores political influences that have shaped early years policy to provide a context of the relational position of the early years sector to the educational community, for example, primary, secondary and higher education provision.

2.4 Political influences on early years policy

The following section explores how political influences across political parties have shaped early years policy over the past three decades. The previous section explored how the early years discourse evolved from care to education and care centred approaches. The following section follows on from this theme to explore how research began to influence early years policy as a force to aid social mobility starting in children’s formative years, starting with New Labours vision in 1997 and culminates with the latest Conservative government vision for early years provision.

2.4.1 New Labour (1997-2010) government commitment to children

New Labour's (1997-2010) vision of education was a mechanism to lift the masses out of poverty, making children central to this primary objective (Lister, 2003). Stewart (2005) described New Labour's early years agenda as a multi-faceted approach to reducing social inequality. New Labour invested in the development of children's centres, supported the development of early years provision through increased access to funded education places for three and four-year olds and introduced two-year-old funding. New Labour also campaigned to provide targeted training for early years workforce to improve quality. Also, the creation and deployment of the Every Child Matters Agenda (DfES, 2003) sought to create a platform for collaboration and unity across sectors to support children. The following section explores some of these themes and how they have shaped the landscape of early years provision.

New Labour's commitment towards children and families was evident within the policy measures that they implemented throughout their term in office (Figure 2). Ridge (2013) identified that a focus for the New Labour government as the commitment to eradicating childhood poverty by 2020. A comparable point was made by Stewart (2013) who acknowledged that although this aim was ambitious, there was evidence to suggest that child poverty decreased during New Labour's reign. However, The Child Poverty Act 2010 further cemented New Labour's commitment to ending child poverty to ensure that the issue was a permanent feature for any government in office. Child Trust Funds, introduced in 2005, ensured that all children upon reaching 18 years old, had access to some wealth and equality of opportunity (Piachaud, 2012). The policy served as a feed-forward system that aimed to tackle poverty through multiple approaches and met with the outcomes of the Every Child Matters Agenda (DfES, 2003).

The Every Child Matters Agenda (ECM) (DfES, 2003) was a policy that permeated throughout all aspects of the child's life, including health, education, and care services. All professionals working with children

recognised the five stated outcomes of ‘enjoy and achieve’, ‘be healthy’, ‘achieve economic well-being, ‘make a positive contribution’ and ‘stay safe’ (Evans and Rich, 2011). It became a central policy that transcended professional boundaries; it gave a shared vision that professionals and families could universally subscribe to through the five outcomes (Cheminais, 2009).

The focus on closing the attainment gap became a New Labour policy driver for education (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008). The attainment gap is the difference in attainment levels of children from low-income households and children from higher-income households (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Although, other factors such as gender (Beard & Burrell, 2010) and ethnicity (Sammons et al. 2015) are also factors linked to differences in attainment. Political attention explored research into the benefits of early years provision to children’s long-term attainment (Gammage, 2006). Much of the research into early childhood education came from international sources, for example, America (Taggart et al. 2008). Recognition that children’s earliest experiences can impact on later attainment was slowly gaining attention. An earlier example of this influence was the American Head Start program, developed in 1973 to reduce the impact of poverty through a variety of measures including early education (McKey, 1985). The shifting paradigm gained attention from Britain, who adopted similar measures to help support families through the provision of nursery care by local authorities (Petrie, 1984).

New Labour also increased targeted universal children’s services (Ridge, 2013). The creation of Sure Start Centres to provide a one-stop-shop for children and families in the community’s heart was a flagship policy of New Labour. The purpose of Sure Start Centres was to unify children support services through local government-controlled centres intending to reduce poverty and increase quality and availability of access to childcare and services (Bouchal & Norris, 2014). However, the rate of implementation of the Sure Start programmes across England came at a high financial cost, and the complexity within the funding formulas applied made it difficult to identify the cost to implement and run the programme (Bouchal & Norris,

2014). A report by Sammons et al. (2015) researched the impact of Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP), and identified that impact was difficult to assess fully. Each SSLP had individualised targets based on the needs of the community it served, making comparisons problematic. Stewart (2005) pointed out that childcare investment was a way of increasing parent employment, through increased access to early years provision, while quality childhood education would support the child's long-term development goals. Policies evolved that sought to mobilise families from poverty and focused on children and the education system as a way forward (Brook; 2008; Field, 2010; HM Government, 2010).

New Labour invested efforts through various initiatives to increase the social mobility of adults starting in childhood (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014). New Labour's mantra was "education, education, education" (Blair, Huntley Film Archives, 1997). The ideology was that education was an avenue to aid upward social mobility (Power & Whitty,1999). Sure Start centres developed across the country to open in areas classified as deprived by the government and based on the American Head Start model (Belsky et al. 2007). Barlow et al. (2007) explained that available support was within walking distance of homes for people in a family-wide area, from conception to primary school beginning. Health, education and care sectors came together in one place to offer a range of services, becoming one of the most successful examples of multi-agency, cross-collaboration this country had seen to date (Robinson & Cottrell, 2005; West et al. 2016). It also emphasised the government's commitment to improving life outcomes for children through the ECM outcomes. Significantly, concerning this thesis, through health and education. The development of the childcare and education sector developed because of these political and social drivers.

The New Labour government (1997-2010) perspective was clear; children's formative years are essential and require skilled, experienced practitioners to guide and support children (Power & Whitty,1999). Ball and Vincent (2005) claimed that the New Labour's government (1997-2010) commitment to early

education was an investment to improve social mobility. New Labours' contribution to early education was acknowledged by expanded access to early years for three-and four-year-olds and implementing two-year-old education funding (Lewis & West, 2017). New Labour took a multi-faceted approach to early years provision, through recognition that the quality of the early years provision was essential. Therefore, New Labour created the Graduate Leader Fund to help raise the skills of the early years workforce with the goal of achieving a graduate lead in all settings by 2015 (see 2.6) (Mathers et al. 2011). However, the change of government in 2010 altered some of the policies bought in by New Labour and will be discussed in the following section.

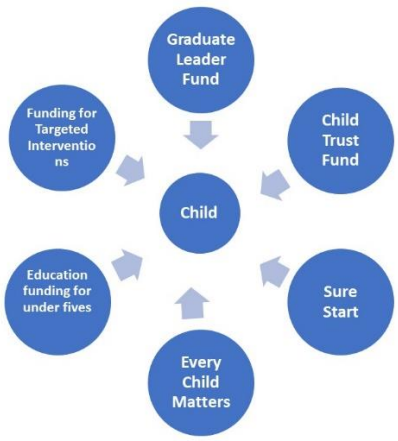

Figure 2: New Labours child focussed strategies

2.4.2 **Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010-2015)**

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition took office in 2010. The main focus of the Coalition government was to reduce the national deficit and looked at public spending as a factor to support this goal. Stewart and Obolenskaya (2015) identified that the Coalition government aim was to offer more services for less money and introduced austerity measures to help reduce public funding. Austerity measures refer to a policy to reduce government fiscal deficits by reducing the country's welfare and public spending budgets (Domingos, 2014). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have been impacted socially and educationally as a result of the austerity measures.

Although the Coalition announced that they would honour the earlier target of reducing child poverty by 2020, the same report highlighted that policies came secondary to reducing the fiscal deficit (Ridge, 2013). The report suggested that the Coalition governments' main focus was to reduce the deficit; therefore, reducing child poverty was unlikely to happen using the previous government's definition of poverty. The term 'poverty' embodies varying factors, therefore, Lyndon (2019) noted that poverty is challenging to define. An emergency budget called in June 2010, declared support for the most vulnerable in society including children and the elderly, however, later in the same document, detailed a funding freeze of three years to child benefits (HM Treasury, 2010). Austerity measures affected children on every level, from family spending to education. This point was supported by Kelly et al. (2018) who recalled that the funding cuts made to all areas of public spending, including education and health explicitly impacted on children. Similarly, Lewis and West (2017) reflected that the austerity measures caused a significant challenge to the early years sector in supporting young children from every perspective, including training staff and supporting children delayed in meeting early learning goals.

The Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda (DfES, 2003) went through a re-branding process to be retitled Helping Children to Achieve More, within a year of the Coalition government taking office. Puffett (2010) addressed the changes to the ECM's terminology stressing that the terminology change was one of many that the Coalition Government made when taking office. Concerns raised that the change in wording signalled a move away from the main principles of the ECM; however, the government denied this was the case (Puffett, 2010). Over time, the Coalition government moved away from the original ECM agenda, with achievement as only one of the five outcomes remaining (Stewart & Obolenskaya, 2015). Jones (2012) posited the view that the new focus on Helping Children to Achieve More, reflected the Coalition governments strive towards attainment. Jones (2012) also contended that the ECM agenda aligned with expensive family support programmes that the austerity campaign could not support, thereby requiring

a rebranding as part of a phased approach to withdrawing the agenda from public services.

2.4.3 **Conservative (2015-present)**

The Coalition government included both Conservative and Liberal Democrats. Therefore, some of the policies adopted by the Coalition government and discussed in the earlier section continued with the Conservative government when they took over sole leadership of the country in 2015 (Shain, 2016). Austerity measures continued when the Conservatives took office with warnings that the measures would continue to impact the most vulnerable within society and increased the gap between the “rich and poor” (Shain, 2016: 12).

Conservative policies have adversely affected the early years sector in several ways. The introduction of compulsory GCSE in Maths and English at grade C level sought to increase professionalism within the workforce (Gaunt, 2017b). However, the policy led to a recruitment crisis because the practitioner was required to self-fund the GCSE and on minimum wage incomes, this was not always workable (see 3.6) (Faux, 2014). As discussed in section 2.6, the early years sector was a desirable career choice for people with low educational attainment, and therefore, the change to compulsory GCSE made working in the sector challenging (Walker, 2016).

The Childcare Act of 2016 extended the government’s commitment to working families, by increasing the number of hours of funded education provision from 15 hours per week to 30 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year from September 2017 (Local Government Association, 2016). However, these changes came when early years providers were already struggling to stay sustainable, following the increase in living and minimum wage and compulsory employee pension payments. A report by Ceeda (2014) that was produced before the increase in funded provision, tracked 5,635 funded and non-funded children across 100 early years settings in a two-week term period. The findings of the report indicated that there was a 17 per cent

shortfall per hour, per child, between the cost to provide a childcare place and the funding provided by the government. This figure rose to 20 per cent in the London area. Providers could absorb some of these shortfalls with wrap-around care exceeding the 15 hours of funded education. Therefore, providers struggled with the 30-hour funding because the increase in hours meant that many parents did not need enough wrap-around care to cover the overhead costs of the setting (Parkes, 2017). A research report commissioned by the Department for Education studied overhead costs for early years providers and found that the sector's increasing costs were not in line with the government's rate for funded education places (Paull & Xu, 2018). The findings showed that because of rising costs, settings were struggling to stay viable (Gaunt, 2019). The rising business costs to provide quality provision and insufficient funding from the government to support eligible children, resulted in a shortfall between the cost to produce the provision and the income generated from parents and government funding, forcing some nursery closures (Puffett, 2019).

The latest Conservative government manifesto (Conservative & Unionist Party, 2019) referred to reducing child poverty, reducing childhood obesity and creating more quality and affordable childcare. However, the pledges did not discuss how any of these focusses are going to be targeted. Having quality affordable childcare appears to concentrate on the benefits to parents, rather than what's realistic for the sector. Therefore, definitions of quality and affordability are open to interpretation. The manifesto pledged monetary support to primary and secondary schools but not specifically to early years education and therefore, could imply that funding for early years provision may not be forthcoming. As the election took place in the months before completing this thesis, Conservative policies moving forward are yet to be realised.

2.5 Provision

The next sections explore the purpose of education by examining the education systems within England and the policy drivers that shape and guide the practice of teachers and specifically early years practitioners. The section identifies the professional roles and government expectations of practitioners to provide an insight into their professional lives. Factors including practitioners' pay and conditions are discussed. Furthermore, research on practitioners' experiences in helping colleagues improve their practise to better support the children they care for is examined.

2.5.1 The purpose of the education system

The concept of what it means to be a child (see 2.2) links into the debate of what it means to be a child within an English context. England, as with other Westernised cultures, is socially, politically and culturally structured and influences all aspects of an individuals' life (James & James 2017). The education system is an example of one aspect of life these structures shape. The following section explores the purpose of education and the motivation that drives policy that shapes the education system (see Figure 3 for a diagrammatical representation of the education system).

Gibbs (2015) the then Schools Minister, stated in a speech that education had three primary purposes; to be the "engine of our economy," the "foundation of our culture" and to prepare children for adult life. Gibbs (2015) appears to reflect the view of an economy-driven education model that invests in the notion that economic intelligence is a global commodity for trading (Hayler, 2017: 15). Therefore, Hayler (2017: 15) explained that an economy-driven education system drives teaching and learning into a funnel of "test scores, performance targets and accountability tables." Therefore, every level of education must prepare for the next stage until the person is ready to contribute to the economy and society (Lakes & Carter, 2011).

Gibbs' (2015) speech reveals and sets the stage for new studies on how the government views children and discusses policy decisions on education. The next section summarises the education system in England to highlight where the early years provision fits within the broader education landscape.

2.5.2 **The education system in England: an overview**

The current English education system works around chronological ages of a child's life. At each chronological age, a child progresses through different stages of the education system. The stages could be compared to a conveyor belt system, where each stage aims to build on the structure from the preceding stage, also known as constructivism (Brookes et al. 2013). Leland and Kasten, (2002: 5) termed the system of education within England as the "factory model of education" with each stage preparing children for the next stage within their education, with the individual trained to join the labour market as the end product.

In England, provision is made for children from birth to the age of five years (DfE, 2012b). Parents and carers of children from birth to five years old can choose from a range of different early years providers. However, attendance in an early years setting is not compulsory (Antoniou et al. 2012). Private nurseries, known as private independent schools, set their own availability. Private nurseries register with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), or the Independent School Division, which Ofsted oversees. Nannies are employed directly by the child's family and can register with Ofsted, (although not compulsory) and operate from the family home. Child-minders care for children in the child-minders' home and must register with Ofsted. Local Education Authority maintained nurseries open during school term time only and children from two-years-old can attend a maintained nursery school depending on the availability of the school.

Preschools and playgroups are part of the voluntary sector and offer sessional provision (a morning or an afternoon) usually within the community. Individuals or groups can operate the provision and typically run during term

time only with provision offered for two to five-year-olds. Privately owned independent schools offer provision for children from three to five years old. All settings must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Welfare Requirements unless they have applied for and have successfully achieved an exemption (DfE, 2017a). Ofsted regulates the sector through inspection visits to make sure that settings are meeting the minimum levels of care set out in the Statutory Welfare documentation (DfE, 2017a; Ofsted, 2019). However, a report by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) (2019) has raised concerns that the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) used by Ofsted is ambiguous and does not adequately reflect the needs of the children or the levels of qualifications represented by the sector. The NDNA (2019) noted that some level 2 and level 3 practitioners cannot access the language used in the EIF and may not be conscious of Ofsted expectations, and could therefore, fail to comply with mandatory inspection criteria.

The EYFS is divided into two documents; one is the statutory welfare requirements (DfE, 2017a), and the other is the Development Matters guidance (DfE, 2012b). The Development Matters Guidance is a curriculum and is non-compulsory (DfE, 2012b). During Ofsted inspections, settings must show that they are promoting a child's development, therefore, if a setting does not use this guidance, the setting will need to prove how they measure a child's development to ensure that they are progressing towards early learning goals. Early learning goals are the expected levels of growth that children will reach at each age and stage of development defined within the EYFS (DfE, 2013a). Over the past decade, there has been a shift in government perspective, from a curriculum that supports early learning to one that promotes the view that the purpose of early years education is to prepare children for entry into school (Clark, 2017).

Throughout each of the stages of education, the government has provided a central aim of preparation. The aim of preparation charted through carefully constructed stages of education is the preparation for the next stage of development and the next stage of the social process. The government's aim

is to prepare for adult life and to be a productive member of society (Gibbs, 2015). Looking at the whole education system and the purpose of education can help to explain why this research is essential. Development is a critical component in each stage of education; thus, development definitions are vital to understanding why this study is important.

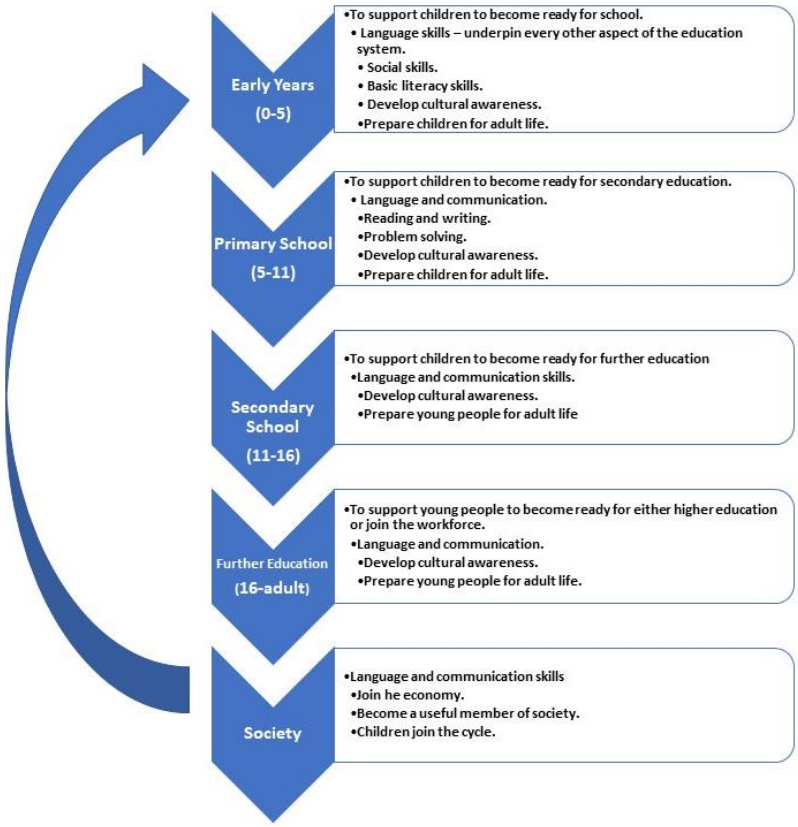

Figure 3: Purpose and stages of education in England

2.5.3 Societal perspectives of the purpose of childhood and the early years

This section provides an overview of the societal perspectives of the purpose of childhood and early years provision based on an overview of the available literature. A study by Evans and Fuller (1998) found that parents' perceptions of the primary purpose of the nursery were to offer play opportunities for children and prepare them for school. Conversely, a study by Foot et al. (2000) of 911 parents revealed the most critical factor for parents when choosing a nursery was safety, followed by education. More recently, the view of preparing children for school has become a driving force within the English early years system and features within the pilot for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2018c).

Introducing the thirty-hour funding has meant that more parents are working longer hours. A survey by the Department for Education on the 30-hour funding found that 71 per cent of respondents stated that it has helped to increase their working hours (DfE, 2018a). Also, the changing family structure to include both married and single-parent families, both parents working, or a single working parent, has increased the pressure on families to juggle work and home lives in sometimes complex family situations (Goldscheider et al. 2015). Parents may spend less time with the child than the childcare provider, or the parent may have limited time to concentrate on particular development skills. The changes in family dynamic have added a shift in discourse in the role of early years provision concerning supporting all aspects of children's development. The evolution of family life has created new discourses in terms of how society perceives the social construction and function of families. The following section addresses how the evolving discourse affects or shapes the social structures that surround them, such as early years provision and practitioners' position and expectations.

2.5.4 The professional roles and expectations within early years settings

This section contains an overview of the different roles within early years settings and the current government expectations of practitioners. The current research explores practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified SLCN. Therefore, the section summarises the current expectations placed on practitioners by the government, the setting and parents to offer an insight into how this could influence the experiences of practitioners shared in later chapters.

The role of the practitioner has passed through many stages and been known by many names. The traditional name is nursery nurse; however, the sector has attempted to move away from this name for many reasons. The term 'nurse' showed the caring element but did not account for the education side of the role (Bertram & Pascal, 2001). As the sector evolved, early years provision occurred not only in a nursery setting but in many other locations such as children centres, peoples' own homes (child-minders) and schools, and so the term 'nursery nurse' did not accurately reflect the role. Whitters (2017: 26) pointed out that nursery nurses "worked with the confines of his or her discipline", whereas the practitioner has a multi-dimensional role that transcends disciplines. Whitters (2017) statement sought the distinction that the role of the early years professional has evolved to include working collaboratively in a multi-agency way. Although the term 'early years practitioner' reflected the role and was understood by those working within the sector, society and specifically parents did not always understand the term and still reverted to the name of a nursery nurse (Simms, 2010). Research by Simms (2010: 47) claimed that the term "nursery nurse" is interchangeable with the job title of "early years practitioner." The varying meaning of what it means to be a practitioner has evolved over time, as addressed by Lightfoot (2019: 28) who claimed "the notion of a single or blended definition of professional identity in the sector is problematic." In a similar vein, Garvey (2017: 13) defined the early years role by clarifying that the term "practitioner" would cover "anyone working in a professional

capacity with young children." Simms, Lightfoot, Whitter's and Garvey's work provided insight into how the early years professional role is interpreted from within the sector and beyond.

Lightfoot and Frost's (2015: 409) research investigated how practitioners perceived their own professional identity. The study involved qualitatively interviewing five practitioners and four teachers. The research found that the participants used a variety of terms to describe their role including "nursery nurse; teaching assistant; early years assistant and early years practitioner." Lightfoot and Frost (2015) indicated that the practitioner's position is so nuanced that it is difficult for professionals working within the field to define. Professional identify is important to practitioners because it impacts how parents and other professionals from external agencies perceive the role and the work that they do (Dyer, 2018). The term 'early years practitioner' is used within the official Early Years Foundation Stage Development Matters (DfE, 2012b) documentation. Therefore, the term 'practitioner' will be used from this point forward to refer to any professional who is working within an early years setting with the responsibility for supporting children's learning (DfE, 2012b).

Appendix A (figure a) provides an overview of the primary responsibilities for each role within an early years setting. The appendix serves to offer an insight into the responsibilities of each role and is not exhaustive. Roles vary according to setting need and therefore the list is not definitive. A primary role for practitioners is a key person. The first release of the EYFS (DfE, 2008) introduced the term 'key person' to describe practitioner's relationship with a child (DfE, 2008). The key person is responsible for all aspects of care and education for specific children (McEvoy & McMahon, 2019). Where possible, the child should be able to choose the key person whom the child feels a connection or bond (McEvoy & McMahon, 2019). The child then becomes the practitioners' key child.

In line with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (SENDCoP) (DfE, 2015) every early years setting must have a Special

Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator and is known in practice as the SENDCo (DfE, 2015). When a child requires more help, the SENDCo supports the child, the child's parents and other staff members within the setting if the support is "over and above that provided routinely as part of universal services" (see 3.2) (DfE, 2015: 66). The SENDCo is also responsible for liaising with external agencies and advocating on the child's behalf. The SENDCo must be a qualified teacher within a maintained nursery school setting. SENDCo training for a school involves an intensive training course taking up to two years to complete. Within a private nursery, the setting can nominate a practitioner to take the role of SENDCo (DfE, 2015). The SENDCoP does not stipulate the level of qualification that a practitioner must achieve to take on the role, and training is not mandatory. Although many local authorities will provide a three-day SENDCo training course for practitioners, settings are not obligated to ensure that their staff attend. The differences in SENDCo training between schools and early years settings could suggest that the government perceive the role of SENDCo in a school to be more complex than the role of SENDCo in a setting. However, as discussed in section 2.6 early years settings can find it challenging to release staff for training, and many do not hold a degree-level qualification. Therefore, it could be perceived as unfeasible to insist on the same criteria for schools and early years settings.

Each private setting will have a manager and a deputy manager, who will be responsible for the general day to day running of the setting, including collating and managing data. There may also be room leaders that take charge of the planning and coordination of learning experiences in each area of the setting and is typically organised by the child's chronological age. Each role requires minimum qualification levels, and the qualification level also impacts on the child: adult ratios within the setting (Appendix a, figures a & b) (DfE, 2017a). Appendix A (figure b) provides an insight into the relationship between the practitioner and the number of key children they can legally care for at one time. David, (1996: 155) explained, traditionally, settings provided sessional times, for example, a morning, or an afternoon. Settings have had to adjust from traditional sessional times, to offer more flexibility for parents

accessing government education funding (Parkes, 2017). Settings will aim to meet the needs of the parents depending upon staffing levels. The implications of flexible attendance have meant that full-time practitioners could be responsible for higher numbers of key children due to the attendance patterns of children. The number of key children that a practitioner is responsible for can influence the experiences of the practitioner in supporting children with identified SLCN and is therefore relevant to the current thesis.

Practitioners have a responsibility to assess all of their key children's development across all areas of learning within the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) (see 2.8). In the early years, practitioners will work with children, families and outside agencies to support children (DfE, 2017a). For children identified as requiring additional support, settings must adhere to the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015). Adherence to the SENDCoP means carefully monitoring the child's progress and supporting the child through a graduated approach to help the child to achieve (see 3.7.2). The identification and support of children with identified SLCN can create more work for the practitioner, who may not receive additional time or resources to meet the needs of the child (Morton, 2020).

2.5.5 Political influences on speech, language and communication needs policy.

As discussed in previous sections, the political influences of successive governments, shaped the early years sector and provision. Political influences have also influenced speech and language services. The following section explores these influences and the impact the provision offered within England to support children's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Speech, language and communication skills are essential to education and life (Bercow, 2008). SLCN are considered a precursor of reduced educational achievement and has, therefore, been the government's focus on reducing the gap in achievement (Bower, 2011; Hoff, 2013). The

current Conservative government (2015- present day) agenda, like successive governments before it, focused on closing the attainment gap between those children who are achieving better outcomes on standardised tests than other children and young people, at pivotal development points (Whitty & Anders, 2017). Current testing takes place at the end of the foundation year before the child begins formal education at five years old with the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) (Standards Testing Agency, 2015); Standard Attainment Tests at six to seven years and 11 years (DfE, 2018a), and GSCEs at age 16 and into further and higher education (Gregg et al. 2013). Standardised tests require speech, language and communication skills through oral expression and receptive understanding. Testing, therefore, highlights why speech, language and communication skills are crucial to academic success (Dockrell et al. 2011).

Previous governments also focussed on speech and language development. New Labour (1997-2010) recognised the benefit of integrated services and through Sure Start Centres, provided access to speech and language therapists for children (Anning et al. 2005). Bercow (2008) raised the importance of speech, language and communication skills, and as a result, New Labour commissioned Bercow to complete a review of the speech, language and communication provision. The Bercow Review (2008: 6) found that the system lacked consistency leading to a "lack of equity" in the provision available across England, stressing that unidentified SLCN had associated risks for the long-term development of the child. The lack of equity across speech and language therapy (SLT) service provision revealed that while speech and language development were essential, there was an inadequate investment in improving and expanding the services available. Following the Bercow Review (2008), the Department of Education commissioned the Better Communication Research Program (BCRP) to research speech, language and communication provision in England (Communication Trust, undated). The research spanned three years and produced 19 reports relating to speech and language service provision and the outcomes of school-aged children (DfE, 2012a). Based on the Bercow

Review guidelines, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (2013:3) was created and noted that although research findings involving data collected and analysed from “6,400 children, 560 parents, 600 speech and language therapists and 750 teachers / special educational needs coordinators” the Coalition government (2010-2015) did not respond to the findings of the published reports. The perceived lack of government response shows that while the effect of SLCN on the educational achievement of children was significant to justify a three-year analysis, funding was not made available to meet the needs of children with SLCN. The apparent lack of funding could suggest that although the government recognise the impact of SLCN it is not considered significant enough to invest in solutions.

Several government policy reports over the past eleven years have emphasised the importance of both identification and early intervention of SLCN (Allen, 2011; Bercow, 2008; Bercow, 2018; Tickell, 2011). Identification of SLCN refers to the process of assessment that highlights the level of children’s development in communication and language to detect areas where the child is not meeting developmental norms (discussed in depth in section 3.3). Recently, under the current Conservative government, reports revealed that SLT programmes experienced cuts in funding, reducing the resources available to support children (Bercow, 2018; RCSLT, 2014 & 2017). Variations in spending to support SLCN across local authorities have resulted in a “postcode lottery” (ICAN, 2019a). The current system means that children living in neighbouring local authorities that may attend the same early years settings could receive different levels of support.

A recent publication by the Children’s Commissioner Anne Longfield (2019) drew attention to the discrepancies in public spending to support children’s SLCN. Longfield requested information from the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) and Local Authorities (LA), relating to spending for speech and language therapy services for children under six years old. The total number of responses received was 218, although not all CCG’s, LA’s or joint CCG and LA groups responded. The information provided statistical data for analysis between different areas of the country. The data appears to be

misleading in areas. For example, the amount of money spent on speech and language therapy services per child is calculated by the number of children in each area, however, not all children within a specific area will require speech and language services. Therefore, the cost per child is variable depending upon the needs of the children in each individual area and may therefore not be comparable. The budget in each LA or CCG group is calculated on every child in the area within the age range of birth to six years old. Not all children require SLT services, and therefore, spending rates differ according to local need; how the money is invested and distributed to those children who need help is an essential factor. The level of need differs in each area according to the socio-demographic of each LA. This level of detail was not available in the report by Longfield (2019).

Longfield (2019) brings attention to waiting times for SLT services. The Bercow Review (2008) stressed the impact of speech and language waiting times, and the issue was echoed in the Bercow: Ten years on review (2018). The media have reported on waiting times for speech and language support (Cassidy, 2014; Morton, 2013; Richardson, 2012). Waiting times featured in a survey conducted by YouGov for ICAN and the RCSLT (ICAN, 2019a&b). Over 1000 parents took part in the survey with 59 per cent stating that they had to fight to get support for their child's SLCN, although the report does not say what steps parents had to take to get support. Parents did, however, report waiting times were frustrating and 55 per cent of parents stated that the level and amount of support provided was inadequate (ICAN, 2019b). Waiting times are thought to have a detrimental impact on children's development as this can delay interventions. Sometimes, children did not receive support until they had already transitioned to school if at all (Morton, 2013).

The section has explored the changes in English governments in the past twenty years from New Labour (1997-2010) to a Liberal Democrat and Conservative Coalition government (2010-2015), to Conservative (2015-present). The government-commissioned reports showed the importance of speech, language and communication skills to children's development;

however, the investment into funding and supporting SLCN appears to be inconsistent (Bercow, 2008; 2018). A coalition of 60 organisations led by the charity, ICAN, and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) have called for the current government to do more to support children's language development, including more training for those professionals working with children, and more support services (Hazlegreaves, 2019).

2.6 Qualification levels of early years practitioners

Qualification levels are an essential component to understanding practitioners' experiences. Qualifications underpin the practitioners' knowledge and understanding of child development and impact how they assess and support children within an early years setting. The following section provides a brief historical overview of the sector concerning qualifications and how qualifications have evolved over the past twenty years.

The qualification levels of the early years workforce have been the focus of debate for the past two decades (Calder, 1999; Faulkner & Coates, 2013). Traditionally, the societal view was that working with young children was a natural choice for people who did not achieve minimum pass grades in secondary education. Nutbrown (2012: 9) described the phrase "hair or care" as the historically defined options available to young people, though mostly young girls, who were unlikely to attain minimum C grades or higher at GCSE. The result was that working in the early years sector gained a reputation for poorly educated, unqualified practitioners (Findlay et al. 2009; Osgood, 2004). Therefore, the publications of research reports such as the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) report (Sylva et al. 2004), and the Researching Effective Pedagogy in Early Years report (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002), brought political attention to qualified practitioners.

In response to the research, New Labour introduced the Graduate Leader Fund intending to create a graduate led early years workforce by 2015

(Mathers et al. 2015). Based in part, on the results of the EPPE report (Sylva et al. 2004), the government created the Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) to improve skills for practitioners and to improve the quality of early years. The EPPE study involved extensive research into the impact of early years provision on children's long-term attainment through the assessment of children's development and the quality of the early years provision. The longitudinal study had a participant sample of 2860 children from a range of 141 early years settings and an additional 310 children who had minimal or no preschool attendance. Sylva et al. (2004) defined quality within the EPPE project as a combination of the qualifications and experience of practitioners to provide quality learning experiences for children through the learning environment. The study explored child development levels at age three, entry and exit from the reception year and end of year one. Sylva et al. (2004: 40) presented the results from the assessments that highlighted that children who attended high-quality provision made increased gains in maths and English levels, compared to those children who had not attended early years provision, showing the significance of qualification levels to children's attainment. The findings of the EPPE study showed that qualified staff have a greater depth of understanding of child development and assessment processes and are, therefore, in a position to identify and support children with SLCN.

A government review of early years qualifications led by Nutbrown (2012) echoed the findings of the EPPE study. Nutbrown (2012: 6) brought attention to what she identified as a confusing early years qualification system with an array of qualifications that did not adequately equip the "workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide high-quality early education and care." The range of "complex and confusing" qualifications where the quality and content could not be verified was acknowledged by the Nutbrown Review (2012: 17). Content and quality are essential in ensuring that the workforce can evaluate and support children in all areas of learning. Therefore, Nutbrown (2012) recommended an overhaul of early years qualifications to reduce confusion and improve the quality of the qualifications on offer to practitioners.

The recommendations resulted in establishing level 2 as an entry-level sector qualification equivalent to one GCSE graded A-C (new grade structure 4-9). However, Nutbrown (2012), voiced concern that a level 2 qualification was not sufficient in establishing the skills and knowledge required to support children fully and recommended a minimum level 3 for all practitioners. Nutbrown's (2012) view considered the fact that a level 2 qualification typically took around a year to complete through workplace settings or college-based providers (Smith, 2012:150). The recommendation by Nutbrown (2012) was ambitious because of the traditional lower educational attainment level of young people entering the early years workforce, and therefore level 3 could prevent practitioners from entering the early years workforce and add to the recruitment crisis (Gaunt, 2017a). Level 2 qualifications were suggested to provide a basic understanding of child development, with the expectation that level 2 practitioners should be supported by more qualified colleagues (DfE, 2017a). The government upheld some of Nutbrown's (2012) recommendations with compromises made on other recommendations. For example, the introduction of a compulsory requirement for practitioners to hold a minimum full and relevant level 2 or 3 qualification to count in adult: child ratios. The amended guidance contained a concession that a minimum level 3 practitioner must supervise level 2 practitioners at all times (DfE, 2017a).

Level 3 is the most commonly held qualification within the early years workforce, according to the Labour Force Survey, a quarterly government household survey (Bonetti, 2019). The Labour Force Survey involving 91,000 respondents showed that in 2018, 18.6 per cent of the respondents were qualified to level 2, 66.2 per cent were qualified to level 3 and 9 per cent to degree level (Bonetti's, 2019: 53). The figures illustrate the most current snapshot of qualification levels within the sector and help to provide context to the current study by highlighting the qualification demographics of the early years workforce.

There are several options for advancing from level 3 upwards. Practitioners can take a stand-alone level 4 and 5 qualifications in areas such as playwork, or aspects of professional practice. There are early years foundation degrees which are a vocational qualification, and then practitioners can top up to gain a full level 6 degree. Alternatively, practitioners can choose to undertake a full three-year degree (QAA, 2008). Following this, there is the option to undertake a post-graduate qualification. Bonetti (2019) showed through the Labour Workforce Survey that nine per cent of practitioners held a degree level qualification. A survey by the Department for Education (DfE) (2016) showed similar findings from a sample of 7665 practitioners, nine per cent of practitioners from Private Voluntary or Independent (PVI) held a level 6 qualification. The DfE (2016) survey also included data from the school-based provision that represented 2880 participants; of these, 34 per cent held a level 6 qualification. A reason for the difference in the number of practitioners from PVI and school-based settings could be that school-based providers have more flexibility to release staff to attend training at a higher level. There are also differences in funding opportunities to support training between PVI and school-based provision (DfE, 2017a).

The aim of New Labour and the driving force behind the GLF was to encourage graduates to gain The Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) (Mathers et al. 2011). In 2006, the EYPS was introduced to ensure equivalence with primary qualified teacher status for practitioners working with children from birth to five years. The EYPS aimed to increase the practitioners' professional profile further and serve as a gold standard for the early years of the sector (CWDC, 2006). The EYPS proved problematic as the status was not considered to be as desirable as Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) as the qualification limited the graduate to teaching early years. As a result did not gain the same respect or remuneration as within the education sector as graduates with QTS and therefore was not attractive to many graduates, with low recruitment rates recorded by higher education providers (Nutbrown, 2012). To address the notion of respect Nutbrown (2012) in her review, recommended a change of title from Early Years Professional Status to Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) with the aim that the qualification

would be equivalent to QTS in pay and recognition. Although the name of the qualification changed, the qualification still did not achieve the equivalent pay or recognition as the Qualified Teacher Status and did little to bolster recruitment (Morton, 2018).

Since the New Labour strategy, there has been a consistent decrease in the number of people taking the higher-level status (Bonetti, 2019). The reasons for this could be because of a lack of pay and recognition. However, removal of the stipulation for a graduate led workforce by 2015 by the Coalition Government (2010-2015) could also explain the decline in practitioners achieving degrees. When the Coalition Government took office, the discontinuation of the GLF made it difficult for practitioners to gain a degree. Studying at degree level required a student loan to pay the tuition fees and might explain why the numbers attaining this qualification level are lower than at levels 2 and 3 (Osgood et al. 2017; Stewart & Obolenskaya, 2015). The government's involvement in shaping qualifications and training in the early years has led to confusion in the sector according to Elwick et.al. (2018: 521) who stated there was now: "a complex system for settings, employers, staff and prospective trainees to negotiate." Elwick et. al. (2018) went on to suggest that the complex system of qualifications and training in the early years has contributed to the recruitment difficulties within the sector.

Qualification levels are relevant within early years settings because of the government ratio stipulations, and the underpinning knowledge required to identify children with SLCN and to support the children once identified. The support that practitioners can provide depends upon many factors, including the skill, the time, and the capacity to assess and support individual children. The removal of the GLF by the Coalition Government meant that there was less access to qualifications and the cost of qualifications also increased. Therefore, there was a shift from the government entirely or partially funding qualification costs, to the practitioner or the setting funding the qualification (Gaunt, 2018a, b &c). Due to the low pay of the sector and sustainability issues, accessing training became challenging for practitioners. This point was illustrated in an interview with Sobel, the founder of the Inclusion Expert,

who stated that the early years sector is underqualified and not equipped to support the needs of the children within the setting (Gibbons, 2020).

Stewart and Waldfogel (2017: 37) reported the government have moved away from assuring and enhancing quality in the early years sector by withdrawing policies that assisted the sector in continuous professional development (CPD). These strategies included funding to gain qualifications and the removal of the local authority in monitoring and supporting quality and CPD within settings. The changes meant that there were gaps within the workforce in the level of skills required to assess and support children and could reflect a view that the government does not perceive qualifications as a factor of quality and assessment. Recently, the creation of an Early Years Workforce Commission (EYWC) consisting of early years sector members will examine the issues facing the sector (Gaunt, 2020). The Commission will explore possible solutions to the current recruitment and retention crisis and look at the quality and availability of CPD for both new and existing early years practitioners.

The section has explored the qualifications within the early years sector, the impact on the quality of the provision provided to children and the recent challenges of accessing qualifications. The section identified that despite efforts by Nutbrown (2012) to simplify the early years qualification system in England, the system remains confusing and complex. The system has led to a decline in the number of practitioners obtaining the EYTS qualification. I also highlighted that the sector is experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties that has led to a skills gap within the workforce that can impact the practitioners' ability to access and support children within the setting. The next section explores the pay and conditions of practitioners. Qualifications, pay and conditions impact on how practitioners perceive their role and therefore provide context to understand their experiences of supporting children.

2.6.1 Pay and conditions

The early years workforce is a minimum wage sector (Bonetti, 2020). Pay and conditions within the early years workforce have been a focal point of debate within the sector for some time (Akhal, 2019; Gaunt, 2020b; Irvine et al. 2016; Kay et al. 2019; Simpson, 2010). The level of pay that a practitioner can expect to receive rarely differs concerning the level of qualification that the practitioner holds (Bonetti, 2019). However, a report by Ceeda (2018: 38) showed that the level of qualification a practitioner holds is reflected in the hourly rate received between a level 2 and a level 6 practitioner. Figures from the DfE 2016 survey, however, highlighted that pay levels are not always equal across the sector with 10 per cent of practitioners over 25 years old, paid below the National Living Wage. The figure rose by one per cent, with 11 per cent of staff over 25 paid less than the minimum wage in 2018 (DfE, 2018a). The figures demonstrate that practitioners receive low pay and cite pay as a reason for leaving the sector (Akhal, 2019; Ceeda, 2018). The challenges experienced within the sector as discussed in section 2.4.3 to remain sustainable provided a rationale for lowered staff pay and also provided a reason why practitioners may struggle to pay for training, as discussed in section 2.6.

2.6.2 Experiences and professional learning of early years practitioners

Section 2.6 highlighted the qualifications of practitioners; this section will explore the value of practitioner experience. The section explores experience from two perspectives; sharing experiences to support professional roles and research that has explored the experiences of practitioners supporting children with SLCN.

Cotton (2013: 19) described experiences as “professional learning” and suggested that training schemes can be detrimental rather than helpful, as

the individual relies upon a scripted response to a situation or event. Cotton (2013) posited the view that there are new ways of understanding experiences through knowledge exchange with other practitioners. Sharing alternative approaches to recognising and addressing communication and language needs may help the child by using a variety of strategies. Wenger (1998) claimed that practitioners could see such an environment as a variance from “a community of practice” in which practitioners enter the community (the early years in this case) and learn from other early years community members. Through sharing the experiences of other members of the community, practitioners have access to a fount of knowledge of other experienced professionals. Alexander (2018: 12) described this process as a professional dialogue that can only work efficiently with the appreciation of each member to add value to the group. In this respect, with each encounter, a new understanding occurs and therefore indicating that experience is as valuable as training (Feriver et al. 2016). Experience relates explicitly to the current study through the exploration of practitioners’ experiences concerning SLCN in the children with whom they work.

Studies that have explicitly sought practitioners’ experiences of working with children with SLCN are few. However, a study by Mroz and Letts (2008) explored practitioners experiences of children with SLCN. Their study involved interviewing 50 practitioners from a range of early years settings. The findings from the research showed that the identification of most of the children happened after the child turned three. Also, 24 per cent of the children they discussed, were identified between two and three years old, and 12 per cent of the children were under two years old. Participants were asked to consider the children with whom they interacted and found that out of 50 participants, 15 described the child as requiring support for SLCN. Parents identified eight of the children, with the remaining children identified by other professionals. Hall’s (2005) research used the same raw data as the Mroz and Letts (2008) study; however, Hall’s (2005) research focussed on the qualitative responses of the participants. The focus of Hall’s (2005) paper was the practitioners’ experiences of working with external services such as speech and language therapists. The points raised by participants were

around frustration at poor communication from SLT services because of a range of factors, including the process, prioritisation of children and budgets. The participants talked about information sheets being sent out by SLT services with no real guidance on how to administer the advised interventions.

This section has explored shared experience to support practitioners in their role. Shared experience is important in a climate of funding cuts and provides opportunities for practitioners to learn from one another in meaningful ways. The section also addressed practitioners' perceptions of supporting children with SLCN (Hall, 2005) and concluded that children were primarily defined as needing help after their third birthday. Practitioners in Hall's (2005) study reported feeling frustrated by the process, prioritisation of children and budgets for accessing support from SLT services. The following section explores the introduction and evolution of the early years curriculum to provide context to how practitioners come to understand their role through the engagement with a government instigated early years curriculum.

2.7 Introduction of the early years curriculum

Over the past two decades, early years education and care have evolved from no formal assessment procedures to a non-compulsory curriculum for children aged three-to-five years old that requires some form of assessment. The following section summarises how the changes have shaped the current curriculum and assessment processes within England. Assessment is necessary for the formal identification of SLCN and underpins the organisation of support for SLCN.

The introduction of the first curriculum for early years education in 2000, for three to five-year-olds, emphasised the shift from a care-based provision to one that focused on education (DfEE, 2000). As discussed in section 2.3 the shift from care to education within the early years were part of the changing ideological vision of successive governments that recognised the significance of children's early learning experiences to long-term attainment (Sylva et al.

2004). The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) included learning goals known as desirable outcomes that should be met by the child at specific developmental stages (DfEE, 2000). The original purpose of the New Labor Government was to use the curriculum for children receiving government nursery funding (Soni, 2012). The funding provided an incentive for practitioners to accept the change from no curriculum to a curriculum for three to five-year-olds and therefore created less resistance from a play based pedagogical approach.

The focus shifted from three to five-year-olds, to under-threes, with the publication of the Birth to Three Matters Framework (BTMF) (DfES, 2003). The BTMF targeted practitioners supporting children between the ages of birth to three years and focussed on four aspects (David et al. 2003). The four aspects were: a strong child, a skilful communicator, a competent learner and a healthy child. The aim of the authors of the BTMF was twofold; providing a new perspective from which to view the child while creating a soft curriculum, defined by:

> “all experiences both planned and unplanned that the child is involved in, including the physical space, resources and the people with whom the child interacts” (Abbott & Langston, 2005:135-136).

The BTMF document was a framework for practitioners working with children from birth to three and was not compulsory (Abbott & Langston, 2004). The purpose of the BTMF, according to Abbott and Langston (2004: 131) was to concentrate on "efficient rather than best practice" and provide a framework that could evolve with time. The focus of the BTMF was derived from discussions in the research team responsible for creating the framework of what it means to be a child. The team wanted the documentation to reflect the view that childhood was both a temporal and cultural construct (Abbott & Langston, 2004: 131). David (2007) stressed the document emphasised emotional attachments and the importance of early relationships to children’s holistic development. The framework provided a contrast between assessment in specific areas of learning for three-year-old’s, to more

caregiving nurturing approaches for children under three, creating differentiation in children's development stages (Manning-Morton, 2006).

This section has provided an overview of the introduction of the first early years curriculum. The section concluded that the implementation of the curriculum added a dimension to the perspectives of children and childhood in England by transforming social expectations of early years provision into the suppliers of education and care. The following section explores the next phase of early years curriculum that focussed on children from birth to five.

2.7.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage

The previous section explored the introduction of the first early years curriculum from three to five years old (DfEE, 2000) and the introduction of the Birth to Three Matters framework (DfES, 2003). The following section identifies the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008b) as the first inclusive curriculum for children from birth to five.

The Labour government created one coherent curriculum that supported children from birth to five, in response to the ten-year strategy that sought to place the child at the centre of provision (Bull, 2005). The Childcare Bill (House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (HCCSFC), 2005) set the groundwork for the roll-out of the Early Years Foundation Stage for all children attending any setting from birth to five years old. The aim was to create a "level playing field" for all early years providers from both maintained and PVI sectors and to improve the quality of early years provision for children (Bull, 2005: 2). The Childcare Bill (HCCSFC, 2005) also specified the areas of learning that would structure the EYFS in addition to the statutory welfare requirements. Significantly, the Childcare Bill (HCCSFC, 2005) also stipulated the assessment of children's development and Ofsted's role in monitoring assessment, showing the movement towards formalised assessment measures for young children.

The development of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008b) used the CGFS, BTMF and National Standards for Day Care while incorporating the principles of the Every Child Matters agenda and Child Care Act 2006 (Roberts-Holmes, 2012). Roberts-Holmes (2012: 32) emphasised that the heart of the EYFS was the "merged concepts of education and care." Evidence of the concepts of education and care within the EYFS design through the retention of the four aspects of the BTFM discussed in the previous section. The DfES (2008b) renamed the four aspects 'themes and commitments' and were threaded throughout the curriculum. The themes were: A unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and developing. The curriculum had six areas of learning: Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication, Language and Literacy; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development and Creative Development. Each area of learning had early learning goals (ELG) similar to the desirable outcomes from the CGFS (DfEE, 2000). The learning goals had specific skill descriptors, defined in the guidance at the end of each age and stage of development with 69 early learning goals across all learning areas (DCSF, 2008b).

There was a government expectation for practitioners to plan for each child across all areas of learning and assess the child against the ELG's. Practitioners complained of the dearth of paperwork that threatened to impact on the quality of care offered to the children because of the time taken to complete assessments and plan activities that took the practitioner away from the child (Brooker et al. 2010). Brooker et al.'s (2010) research identified the theme of paperwork in their study involving 198 practitioners of their experiences of the EYFS. Practitioners found the amount of paperwork overwhelming and either spent less time with the children or completed the paperwork at home on their own time (Brooker et al. 2010: 50). Silberfeld and Horsley (2014) observed that the considerable rise in time comsumed by the increased documentation took the practitioner away from the child. The increased time for paperwork implied that there was less time to support the child with SLCN.

In response to the practitioner and sector concerns, a revision of the EYFS followed a review by Tickell (2011). There were changes to the areas of learning with the split of communication, language and literacy to create seven separate areas of learning. The changes saw the characterisation of the areas as either prime or specific. The prime areas of development were defined within the EYFS as “particularly crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive” (DfE, 2017a: 7). The recognition of communication and language as pivotal for building children’s capacity to learn is significant concerning this thesis as the primary focus is children with identified SLCN.

The second edition of the EYFS also saw a reduction in the early learning goals from 69 to 17 in an aim to reduce the amount of paperwork generated (DfE, 2012b). Nevertheless, practitioners pointed out that the amount of paperwork required to track and assess children varied little with the second release of the EYFS (Silberfeld & Horsley, 2014). In a review of the changes to the curriculum, Cotzias and Whitehorn (2013) conducted research that involved 118 reception teachers providing feedback on the EYFS guidance. Cotzias and Whitehorn (2012: 57) found that participants felt the guidance was “open to interpretation.” The finding suggested that practitioners and teachers might assess children at different ages and stages, therefore, indicating assessment may not be a reliable measure of children’s achievement. Also, because of the focus of accountability (discussed in section 2.8) planned experiences and activities for children centred around the preoccupation of linking activities to the EYFS and caused a narrowing of the learning experiences offered by providers (Campbell-Barr et al. 2012).

The prescriptive nature of the EYFS can be detrimental to children’s development, according to Edgington et al. (2012) who argued, the purpose of the EYFS is to ‘normalise’ or standardise children’s development. This approach was termed a “norm-referenced measure that only succeeds in recognising delay” by Pengreen (2018: 10). These views reflect the EYFS as a tool to identify normal levels of development. Section 2.9 addresses the

normalisation of children's development as the average age at which all children should master specific skills (Honig, 1983). The EYFS builds upon the principle of the Unique Child and therefore, Edgington et al. (2012), claimed that the EYFS contained opposing ideological principles. The implication is that any experiences that do not fit within the EYFS model, therefore, are either undocumented or considered anecdotal and not necessary. Language development requires a broad range of experiences to stimulate and encourage language development (see 2.9.1) and therefore narrowing experiences could be detrimental (Moylett & Stewart, 2018; Nutbrown, 2020; Pascal et al. 2019).

All levels of education have experienced review, reform and improvements in recent years as reported by Walter (2019). The early years sector is the latest within these educational reforms, with proposed changes to the EYFS Development Matters (DfE, 2012b) documentation piloted in the 2018-2019 school year (DfE, 2018a). Concerns led by sector specialists, (Bradbury, 2019; Moylett & Stewart, 2018; Pascal et al. 2019 among others), focused on the claims that the curriculum of the early years was being restricted to more academic areas of learning, while the government overlooked the broader aspects of early years. Communication and language are the precursor skills to literacy. The move towards academic learning could create a greater focus on literacy skills and shows why the identification and support of children with SLCN are essential.

Neaum (2016) suggested that the societal view of early years education is based upon a competency model, that emphasised what a child can do and how they do it. However, as Neaum (2016) pointed out there is a conflict from ideology influencing policy that pursues a shift towards a performance model approach, that seeks to identify pre-set skills for a child to achieve and works on a deficit basis, aiming to fill the alleged 'gaps' in a child's skill base. A report from Pascal et al. (2019: 51) reviewed the proposed changes to the EYFS and found that the current EYFS supports the needs of the majority of children, however, does not fully support "less advantaged children" who go on to "underachieve" perpetuating the attainment "gap as they progress into

primary schooling." This report appears to emphasise the importance of the EYFS as a stage of preparation for school (Clark, 2017). The report also highlighted that some modifications to the area of communication and language, along with support strategies, could improve children's outcomes.

This section explored how the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) developed over time. The prescribed approach of the EYFS in shaping normative levels of development was discussed and concluded that the ambiguity of the tool can result in inconsistent child development profiles. The section also identified that the move to more academic modes of learning has created a greater emphasis on literacies skills, and concluded that modifications to the area of communication and language within the EYFS is needed. These modifications along with support strategies could improve outcomes for less advantaged children. The following section explores the purpose of assessment from alternative perspectives to provide clarity to the role of the practitioner that helps to shape their experiences of supporting children.

2.8 The Purpose of assessment in the early years

The previous section explored the introduction of the first early years curriculum and also signalled the start of formal and accountable assessment of young children's development. The following section explores assessment and investigates the primary method of assessment, how assessments are used and by whom, and the challenges associated with the current methods of assessment in the early years.

Dubiel (2016) asserted that the primary method of assessment within the EYFS is observation. Practitioners observe children engaged in various learning opportunities and then plot their development against the early learning goal descriptors set out in the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). The practitioner decides on how well the child has mastered the skill by determining attainment levels. Children's attainment levels within the early years are divided into three categories; emerging, expected or exceeding the minimum levels of attainment (Glazzard, 2014). Children at the exceeding level of

attainment are above the expected level of development for their chronological age and stage of development. Children assessed at the expected level are at the accepted rate of development for their age and stage of development, and children assessed at the emerging level have not yet attained the expected rate of development for the child's chronological age and stage of development (Glazzard, 2014: 75). The aim is for all children to be achieving within the expected rate of development. Children who fall into the emerging category may have an additional learning need(s). The emphasis of this research are children assessed at below expected levels of attainment for their age and stage of development. These are the children that require accurate identification and then support to help them achieve the expected levels of development.

The practitioner determines what, who and how to observe and can impact the effectiveness of the assessment. Dubiel (2016: 91) proposed that a practitioners' "value prism" determines the factors through which they observe children and ultimately decide on a child's level of development against the ELG descriptors. Values come from the level of qualification and experiences that require practitioners to observe all 17 ELG's over a specific period to collect data as part of the assessment and tracking procedures set out by LA's (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017). Furthermore, internal and external factors such as experience and the qualification level of the practitioner, the focus of the setting, the individual child's needs, and political drivers from both local and national levels influence observational assessments.

Assessment provides many functions for educators to assess and determine children's development level and identify areas of strength and areas where children may need assistance. Another more recent function briefly identified in the previous section is accountability for educators in ensuring that children meet the expected levels of development (Pierlejewski, 2019). Husain et al. (2019) clarified that practitioners are expected to track children's development to chart progress through the ELG's to construct individual child development profiles. The child profile helps to identify developmental areas

classified at the below or emerging level to target support through individualised plans (Basford, 2015). The function of assessment according to Basford (2015) is to identify children who require additional support to improve opportunities for early identification and future interventions with the aim of supporting children to reach expected development levels. The setting and in some areas the LA, uses the profiles, to monitor individual child development and to monitor expected levels of progress across all the children registered with the setting (Bradbury, 2019; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016).

Palaiologou and Male (2019) highlighted a further purpose of assessment is to measure the effectiveness of the provision as evidenced through the pilot of the latest EYFS (DfE, 2018a). The planned inclusion of a baseline test to compare children's attainment results may increase the pressure on practitioners and teachers to push an attainment agenda. According to Palaiologou and Male (2019: 26) the proposed changes do not allow room "for the child to be a child, instead creating the performer child, where outcomes, goals and outputs are observable and measurable." The image of a performer child suggests increasing pressure on the child and providers to fulfil government agendas.

The reasons for an assessment can influence the information collected. Assessing children to identify the stage of development, strengths and weaknesses, places the child as a motivator for assessment. Assessments, in this sense, focus on what children can do and how support might help the child to the next stage. Conversely, assessing children to collect data to fulfil government agendas can mean that assessments are rushed and completed ineffectively. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) cautioned that the assessment obtained for data purposes, which can be a driving force in early years assessment, can lose impetus as the justification for the assessment is blurred and can therefore influence judgment. Data-driven assessment positions the need for data at the focus of the observation and therefore forces the observation in a particular direction. Support depends on the data

collected and therefore, accurate and reliable assessment is critical in supporting children.

The data-driven practice was a finding of Roberts-Homes and Bradbury's (2016) qualitative research that spanned twelve months across three early years settings. The researchers found the amount of data expected for different purposes overwhelmed the practitioners. Data tracking for children's levels of development was a key feature within the research, with participants discussing the pressure that they felt to show the progress of children (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016: 5). Accountability measures can impact the quality of assessment where practitioners may be influenced to place children within the expected bracket of development for their age and stage, to avoid potential ramifications that children are not progressing as quickly as they should be (Bradbury, 2019).

As discussed in section 2.4.3, the Conservative government vision of education focusses around preparation (Gibbs, 2015). Children require skills so they can participate in the curriculum when they reach school age (Neaum, 2016). The term "school readiness" is a descriptor for how society views the purpose of early years education (Neaum, 2016: 240). To this end, the government have developed a Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) to assess children's attainment levels at age four in maths, literacy, communication and language (Roberts-Holmes et al. 2019). The intention of the RBA is not to "provide detailed diagnostic information about pupils' areas for development" (STA, 2020: 4). The point of the RBA according to the STA (2020: 4) is to provide a "starting point" for a cohort of children on entry into school to measure progress at the end of key stage 2. The data is not intended to be used as an accountability aid for individual practitioners or teachers' performance, however, it will be used as an accountability measure for primary school attainment from 2027 (Roberts-Holmes et al. 2019). Research by Roberts-Holmes et al. (2019) found that of the participants surveyed (1032-1285) and interviewed (21 participants) 84 per cent perceived the baseline test to be unreliable. Furthermore, participants expressed concerns that children were aware they were being tested and

indicated feelings of failure. In this case the purpose of assessment is to support government understanding and agenda's rather than to benefit children's learning. A concern of the baseline could be made that practitioners begin to teach children before the RBA and enforce the school readiness agenda discussed by Neaum (2016).

The move towards more academic skills was also addressed by Pascal et al. (2019) and emphasised the importance of speech, language and communication skills, that underpin all aspects of school life. Children need to "use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events" (DfE, 2012b: 21). Therefore, assessment plays a role in establishing development profiles to identify and support all areas of development, and speech and language underpins all assessment and learning opportunities. However, in order to assess children, a clear vision of what child development means and is perceived is needed. The following sections aim to provide an understanding of child development and then language development to give context to how assessment is conducted in England.

2.9 Defining development

Defining child development is a vast undertaking and beyond the present study. However, to provide clarity for the process of assessment, it is useful to explore generalised concepts of what child development is and the measures used in the current system. The following section explores definitions of child development to provide context to how child development is assessed and evaluated within early years settings.

Child development is the term used to describe the progress that a child makes in physical and cognitive growth (Keenan & Evans, 2009). Theories of child development vary in terms of how children develop and the structure of development (Palaiologou, 2019). However, theorists consistently agree that individual children develop different skills at different rates (Bukatko & Daeler, 2012). Bukatko and Daeler (2012: 11) emphasised that both biological and environmental factors are responsible for the different rates of development.

Alternatively, Palaiologou (2019) proposed that development is a sociological construct that orders and classifies development into categories. Speech and language development can be defined as a cognitive developmental area that can impact on other areas of development, including social and emotional development, literacy and creativity (Palaiologou, 2019). From a developmental psychology perspective, development is lifelong and can be described as “patterns of change” that occurs throughout an individuals’ life (Palaiologou, 2019: 94). In this perspective, development is not linear, with a start and end point, rather it is continuous, temporal and changing. This is an important perspective because it removes the barriers to when learning should take place and suggests that learning can take place without the restrictions of chronological age.

Armstrong (1995) has shown that the development of children is evaluated more at this point in history than ever before. Child health surveillance measures a range of different factors relating to health (Ware & Harvey, 2013); also, the assessment of cognitive and physical development (Armstrong, 1995; Blackburn, 2014). Martin and Fabes (2008: 4) explained that children develop many skills and abilities known as areas of development or “developmental domains.” The three main developmental domains referred to within child development texts identified by Martin and Fabes (2008: 4) are physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. Pursuant to Martin and Fabes domains, Levine and Munsch (2018) clarified that each area of development is unique and although they may link to other areas of development, will develop at different rates although typically follow a similar trajectory unless the child has specific learning needs. The variability of human development is complex and multi-dimensional, with many factors impacting on individual development rates (Levine & Munsch, 2018). Honig (1983) stressed that research helped define developmental norms to assess the age and pattern of child control of both cognitive and physical competencies. Honig (1983) further clarified that documenting development levels for children is important for assessing an average age for which a child will gain competencies, thus identifying normative development. Researchers have devised specific tests for different developmental domains

to help create a normative measure of development (Honig, 1983). Education, health and care services use the measurements to evaluate the development of children in these areas.

Armstrong (1995) argued that, by seeking to determine 'normality' or average levels of development, it is assumed that the development that falls outside these parameters is, by definition, abnormal. This assumption Armstrong (1995: 396) described as the “problematisation of the normal.” Development is an individual experience and happens at different rates according to Armstrong (1995) therefore, trying to normalise development is potentially problematic and assumes that some children will never achieve at the same level as their peers.

The focus and intensity of developmental norms have increased over time, with ever-growing policies and agendas introduced to ensure that children are developing at similar rates (Ware & Harvey, 2013). The governments’ involvement in children’s growth and development has become ingrained within society, as a part of a child and parents’ life known as the ‘medicalisation of childhood’ (Armstrong, 1995; Francis, 2012). Armstrong (1995: 393) described this evolvement of discourse as a medicine that he names “Surveillance Medicine.” This field of medicine, Armstrong (1995) argued, involved not just the physical body of a child but also the psychological dimension of a child’s development. The phenomena of childhood itself has become prone to “problematisation and medicalisation,” and Francis (2012: 1) stated development was monitored through the constant checks on health and behaviour, with practically every aspect of a child’s life examined, observed and measured. Therefore, Francis (2012) posited the view that through over assessment, particularly in children’s formative years, has sought to problematise aspects of development that were not problems in previous generations.

Research by Tayler et al. (2015) explored the variability of developmental trajectories by observing the development rates of 2498 three to four-year-old children over three years. Tayler et al. (2015) found that the development

trajectory varied depending upon the child's background, indicating that defining "typical" normative development is problematic and dependent upon many factors. The finding is significant because the normative development rates used to assess children against, could be an unrealistic measure of an individual child's progress or development.

Done et al. (2018) proposed that the driving force of education is to ensure that all children can meet set criteria. The point of educators, according to Ofsted (2017: 18, as cited in Done et al. 2018) is to ensure the child "keeps up with their peers." Done et al.'s (2018) point resonates with the discussion in section 2.5.1 relating to the role of education in society. Gibbs (2015) vision of education is that it is the "engine of the economy," therefore servicing all the working parts regularly will ensure the engine to function effectively, and be of a standard that enables optimum output. Normative measures of education enable educators to maximise teaching output. The evaluation and assessment of all children according to set criteria mean educators have a role to play in ensuring the teaching of set criteria to children (Sellgren, 2017). The expected level of attainment is, therefore, the goal and children who fall above or below this level, require additional resources and are therefore not conducive to a seamless and effective system.

Teachers are accountable for the levels of progress that children make (Brill et al. 2018). Hutchings (2015) emphasised that increased pressure to ensure minimum levels of attainment through teacher accountability increases the pressure on children who struggle to meet the minimum expected levels of attainment. This point was also identified within Roberts-Holmes et al.'s (2019) research who found that children were aware testing and expressed feelings of failure. This point was also expressed by Hutchings, (2015: 4) who suggested that the increased pressure that focus on the gaps in children's knowledge can lead to feelings of "failure" from both practitioners and children alike.

Dubiel (2014) stressed that the focus of the linear approach to education suits typically developing children and assumes that all children begin and end at the same point in their learning. In this perspective, children who do not meet the expected levels of attainment have a deficit. However, deficits are a matter of perspective. If the normative view of education is accepted, then the children could be seen to have a deficit in areas. Therefore, the problem starts with defining normality. The following section takes the general definition of child development, specifically focusing on language development to provide context for the current study.

2.9.1 **Defining normative language development**

The previous section explored general child development. This section explores language development. Understanding how language develops in young children can help to provide those working and living with young children, with a knowledge base to not only help children develop essential language skills but also the skill to recognise when a child may need additional support (Oller et al. 2001). The focus of this thesis is the provision for two-year-old children; therefore, the next section will explore normative language measures for a child of this age. Children's speech and language development is assessed from an early age, either within the early years setting that they attend (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016; Outhwaite et al. 2017), or during health visitor checks at two-years-old that include cursory checks on language (Barron, 2010; Broomfield and Dodd, 2004; Featherstone, 2013).

Typically developing children begin early vocalisations from around five months, known as canonical babbling (Oller et al. 2001). These early vocalisations, through interaction with other competent language users, aid in helping children to develop first words, usually at around 12 months (Foster, 2013). According to Bates and Dick (2002: 296), first words typically start with "gestural naming," where children with a typical language trajectory use a mixture of both strategies before oral language develops securely enough to decrease gestures usually at around 12-18- months. Research into the correlation of gestures to language development by Lüke et al. (2017),

involved recruiting forty children aged 12 months and studied spontaneous pointing at 12, 14, 16, 18 and 21 months. The results showed that all the children used spontaneous pointing at the 12-and 14-month stage; however, by 18 months, typically developing children, used fewer gestures and more words.

Deciding upon normative language development concerning vocabulary range can be problematic. For example, research investigating the vocabulary range of children from 16 to 30 months, showed a “massive variability” in vocabulary range between children in different age brackets (Bates et al.1994: 94). For example, a study by Bates et al. (1994) of 1803 children aged between 8 and 30 months, examined the median word ranges between 8-11, 16, 20, 24 and 30 months. The measurement tool was the MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory, that measures vocabulary range, using a checklist of 396 words for infants and 680 words for toddlers. The research found that children aged 18 months had a range of between six to 357 words, with a median word range of 44. Children aged two years old had a word range of 57 to 534 words, with a median word range of 311 (Bates et al. 1994). The word range varied in another study by Rescorla and Alley (2001) with a sample of 422 children aged between 22-26 months. The Language Development Survey was used to measure the vocabulary range of the children and involved a 310-word vocabulary checklist. The child’s mother completed the checklist with a research assistant in attendance. The research found that the mean vocabulary was 185 words, with girls showing a more extensive vocabulary than boys. A more recent study by MacRoy- Higgins et al. (2016: 127) of 36 children found that the average vocabulary range for typically developing two-year-old children was 350 words. The late talkers in MacRoy- Higgins et al.’s (2016) had a vocabulary range of 35 words. However, the article discussed aspects of speech and language development rather than specific words and presented the findings in percentages making a comparison with the typically developing children difficult. The discussion concluded that the challenge of determining normative language development is challenging due to the variability across children.

An alternative study by Ninio (2014: 115) examined the speech patterns of 43, typically developing English-speaking children's early language development, through the Child Language Data Exchange system archive. The archive contained stored observations of children's speech through various research projects; they chose 16 different projects to select the chosen children. Ninio (2014) selected children with a minimum vocabulary range of ten words. The study identified that two-word combinations emerged from around 19 months old, although the mean age across the cohort was 22 -23 months. The study found that speech at this age fulfilled specific functions based on the child's need or want. For example, "blow nose… turn page…wash hand" (Ninio, 2014: 117). Rescorla and Ratner (1996: 154) clarified that if a child had a vocabulary range of less than fifty words and some two-word combinations at age two, specific expressive language impairment would be diagnosed based on previous studies. The clarification offered by Rescorla and Ratner (1996) implied that children who have at least fifty words and some two-word combinations at two years old are developing typically. However, MacRoy-Higgins et al. (2016) explained that children rarely combine words until they have a vocabulary range of fifty words at any age. In each of the studies discussed median word ranges differed as did the vocabulary range of the child participants at each age. The variability could suggest that attempts to create a normative assessment measure for speech and language development is not possible at this time.

2.9.2 **Defining speech, language and communication needs**

The previous section summarised normative speech and language. This section will explore the term 'speech, language and communication need (SLCN).' The SENDCoP is the policy guidance used by all educational settings, including early years (DfE, 2015). The SENDCoP used the term 'SLCN' to define the broad area of need for 'communication and interaction.' The definition provided was:

> Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different, and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives (DfE, 2015: 97).

The phrase speech-language and communication need (SLCN) is an umbrella term to include a range of communication and language needs. However, according to Gascoigne (2015: 9) the term has become problematic, as it is not specific enough to identify individual learning needs. If a child has multiple conditions, professionals need to make a judgement on which condition has the most significant impact on the child. Law et al. (1998) noted that it can often be ambiguous if language is the primary area of need, in cases involving social and behavioural conditions, or a symptom of another underlying disorder such as autism.

Speech and language needs fall into two broad areas: expressive language impairments and receptive language impairments. For an example of how express and language needs can be differentiated see

Table 1. Beitchman and Brownlie (2014: 2) defined expressive language as *“*difficulties producing language, without impaired comprehension.” Therefore, expressive language relates to the physical act of producing sounds and words to make meaning. Beitchman and Brownlie (2014) defined receptive language impairments as the difficulty in comprehending language. The American Psychiatric Association's, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (2013) provided further clarity by identifying language disorders as vocabulary range and understanding concerning children's age.

Table 1: Expressive and receptive language domains (Adapted from Beitchman & Brownlie, 2014: 8)

Expressive	Receptive
Range of vocabulary used	Understanding of words spoken by others or self
Sentence order	Understanding of the word order
Speech sounds (Pronunciation)	Understanding of how pronunciation changes meaning
Use of speech in social situations to create and engage in conversation	Understanding of speech in social situations, purpose, sarcasm, persuasion, jokes

Table 2: Overview of expressive and receptive language needs

Expressive	Receptive
Vocabulary range is shorter and simpler than peers of the same age. Sentence structure is less complex peers of the same age. Use of random or nonsense words sometimes in sentences with no apparent meaning. Avoids speaking situations Word order is confused. Difficulty joining in with games, narratives or organising narratives. Difficulty conveying ideas sometimes resulting in frustration.	Vocabulary range is shorter and simpler than peers of the same age. Difficulty in understanding or following direction. Difficulty in following or understanding stories. Difficulty in following or understanding conversations. Difficulty in understanding concepts such as the rules of games.

The various terminology relating to SLCN can make it difficult for professionals to narrow down the child's specific need(s). The terminology is often ambiguous when relating to SLCN (Bishop et al. 2016). Differences between delay and disorder can be difficult for practitioners working with young children to discern between (Prelock et al. 2008). Table 2 summarises how SLCN relates to the two broad areas of expressive and receptive language; the list is not exhaustive and serves to provide an understanding of the differences and types of language need (Tager-Flusberg & Cooper,

1999). Table 3 provides an overview of how expressive and receptive language related concerns are referred to within the literature.

Table 3: Differences in expressive and receptive language terms

Expressive	Receptive
speech delay (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016; Bercow, 2008)	speech delay (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016; Bercow, 2008)
language delayed (Ghassabian et al. 2013; Gardner, 2006)	receptive understanding (Junge, et al. 2012; Stromswold, 2008)
late talkers (Duff, et al. 2015)	
Slow with language related milestones (Zubrick et al. 2007)	
phonological difficulties and syntax (Hutchinson & Clegg 2011)	
stuttering (Bishop et al. 2017; Johnson, et al. 2012)	

Lilienfeld (2004) pointed out that defining SLCN is problematic because of the many variables to consider, particularly regarding early language development, that can make a unique identification of a specific type challenging. The variation in factors contributing to SLCN can be ambiguous and add to the challenges faced by practitioners and parents in raising concern for the linguistic development of a child. Campbell et al. (2003) characterised delayed speech as children who are understandable to others for less than 75 per cent of the time. Alternatively, Duff et al. (2015) described late speakers as children aged 18-35 months who are slow to learn language without any other comorbidity. In comparison, others suggest that the number of words a child can say at age two is an accurate measure (Paul, 1996; Rescorla & Ratner, 1996). Whereas Dale et al. (2003) indicated that late speakers are known to combine words later than typically developing peers. Zubrick et al.'s (2007) study showed that 19.1 per cent from a sample of 1766 children aged 24 months did not typically combine words. However, the research article does not discuss the vocabulary range of the children within the study. Ninio et al.'s (2014) research also identified this point as their study highlighted that the mean age for combining words was between 22 and 24 months. Therefore, the research suggests that

children who combine words at an later age are language delayed. Raschle et al. (2015) extended this discussion further, suggested that the number of first words by 12 months old and first sentences by two-years-old is a useful gauge in determining delay. In view of the studies cited above the lack of a specific definition suggests that there is a lack of agreed consensus of what an SLCN is, due to the wide range of varying factors.

Much of the research into expressive language development comes from parental report measures (Duff et al. 2015; Snowling & Hulme, 2015) and the validity of the tools used to assess language has been questioned (Dale et al. 2003; Dohmen et al. 2016; Snowling & Hulme, 2015). For example, in the Bates et al. (1994) study, the MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory was used to determine vocabulary range and involved a checklist with 396 words for infants and 680 words for toddlers. The Rescorla and Alley (2001) study, used the Language Development Survey with a checklist of 310 words. In both cases, parents completed the checklist, although there was a research assistant present in the Rescorla and Alley research, the parent completed the checklist. The longitudinal Early Language in Victoria Study (ELVS) involved a cohort of 1911 children, recruited at eight months old and their communication and language tracked at eight, twelve and twenty-four months, with several publications written about the results (Bavin et al. 2008; Reilly et al. 2009). Reilly et al.'s (2009) article based on the ELVS found that parents with a higher educational background are more likely to underestimate their child's language ability. Reilly et al. (2009) suggested the reason for this was that parents with higher education levels were more cautious in their assessment of their child's ability. However, Reilly et al. (2009) pointed out that although this reasoning is speculative, it provides an answer. The finding is significant because many of the standardised tests to identify language development come from parent reports and could therefore suggest the results may not be reliable (Bavin et al. 2008).

Bavin et al.'s (2008) article also based on the ELVS, discussed that parents with lower educational backgrounds were more likely to overestimate their

child's language abilities. The finding suggests that parents may not be the most appropriate avenue to collect data on vocabulary range. Conversely, Eadie et al. (2010) and Glascoe & Dworkin, (1995) argued that as parents are likely to hear all communication attempts, the parent report is the most effective method of identification of a language delay. A child's socio-cultural group may determine variances in the words that the child knows and understands (Hoff & Tian, 2005). A study by Hoff and Tian (2005) examined the socioeconomic status of children and the correlation to vocabulary range and found that children from families of lower socioeconomic status, produced fewer word types than the children from higher socioeconomic statuses. However, the authors did not fully explain what they meant by word types or explained the measurement tool.

This section has identified that defining SLCN can be challenging due to the different variables that can contribute to language development, that may make the identification of a specific type challenging for speech and language therapists. Further factors including the reliability of the tools used to collate and record language vocabulary range may be questioned and therefore concluded that it may be difficult to specifically define a SLCN.

2.10 Summary of the chapter

This chapter identified the political and societal influences that helped to shape the early years sector, from the perspective of the providers of care to the shifting recognition of providers of care and education. The sector changes were explored through contributions from different political parties that conceptualised each theoretical vision of the early years sectors purpose and identity and concluded that the sector currently reflects care and education elements of provision. The chapter identified the education system as a process of preparation that begins in early childhood and continues until adulthood. This factor is essential to the current study because for children to be able to access the curriculum at different stages, their development needs to be secure in the preceding stage. Children's language development underpins other learning areas (Palaiologou, 2019)

demonstrating the importance of language skill to attainment. Children may spend more time in an early years setting than with parents, highlighting the need for skilled practitioners. The importance of skilled practitioners was explored and concluded that the current qualification system is confusing and complicated in addition to the sector experiencing challenges with recruitment and retention of staff that has led to a decline in practitioners gaining higher level qualifications (Elwick et al. 2018). These issues can impact how practitioners assess, identify and support children in their care.

The chapter concluded with an overview of how child development is defined and then assessed against the current early years curriculum of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) with a specific focus on defining normative language development. The key message in this section was that the EYFS might not be applied consistently by practitioners leading to potentially inconsiste9nt child development profiles. Also, in a review of the EYFS Pascal et al. 2019) highlighted that the move to a more academic curriculum under the proposed changes to the EYFS has led to an increased focus on literacy skills, demonstrating the importance of communication and language skills. The current EYFS is suitable for the majority of children; however, the chapter concluded, it may not fully support less advantaged children leaving gaps in their development profiles. There is currently no consistent approach to determining either normative language development or SLCN, and these factors can make it difficult for practitioners to effectively assess, identify and support children's development within the setting. The next chapter explores speech, language and communication needs from a special educational needs perspective and examines how special educational needs are defined and applied.

Chapter 3: Speech and language needs of children

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the political and societal perspectives of the early years sector and identified the professional roles and responsibilities of practitioners and explored the purposes of assessment. This chapter begins by exploring and defining the term “special educational needs” and identifies how speech, language and communication needs of children fit within this term. It explores the use of labels for children with additional educational and physical needs. An exploration of the use of labels for children with speech, language and communication needs is explored, and how this fit within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (DfE, 2015).

The chapter divides into the identification and support of children with speech, language and communication needs. There are attempts to define the term speech, language and communication needs and how these needs can be recognised in two-year-old children. The approaches and techniques used to recognise speech, language and communication needs are systematically discussed besides exploring who is best placed to identify these needs: parent of the infant, health visitor or practitioner. The training to support practitioners’ understanding of language development and language needs are identified and evaluated.

This chapter continues with an exploration of the support available for practitioners to access is critically evaluated from internal and external sources and includes an investigation of the current funding situation to support children’s language needs, and how this can impact the support the child receives in the setting.

Finally, it concludes with an overview of the impact that speech, language and communication needs can have on an individual’s life chances concerning educational attainment, on children’s development and their

social and peer relationships through to adult life. This section aims to emphasise the long-term impacts of unidentified and unsupported speech, language and communication needs.

3.1.1 **Identifying special educational needs and disabilities**

The purpose of identifying special educational needs (SEN) is to ensure that children have access to "equality of opportunity" to help them achieve to the best of their ability (Daniels et al. 2004: 209). The purpose of education according to Gibbs (2015) was to prepare children for the next stage of their development to produce an individual that could contribute towards the economy and society (see 2.5.1). Children who do not follow a typical development trajectory or who may take longer to reach the expected levels of attainment can struggle within the existing education system (Korkodilos et al. 2015). Therefore, the identification of children in the emerging category as requiring additional help, assumes that the child has a learning deficit that requires intervention and support to 'fix' the deficit and help children to progress on to the next stage of their development within the education system (Done et al. 2018). The identification of a child with a SEN, provided alternative ways of viewing the child for educational professionals that seeks to support the child and 'recover' or 'reduce' potential areas where the child may struggle (Hutchings, 2015). The Rochford Review (Rochford, 2016) urged that those professionals assessing children should focus on what the child can do and the progress that they have made through alternative assessment methods to shift perceptions from a deficit model to an abundance model.

The challenge for those professionals working with children is the identification and support for SEN. Research supports the notion of early intervention for health and developmental disorders to improve children's long-term success and outcomes (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016; Dohmen et al. 2016; Greenwood et al. 2010; Pascal et al. 2019). However, intervention assumes that development is not progressing 'normally' and therefore, the

child requires support to help them achieve at the same rate as their peers (Ofsted, 2017). This consideration is important to the current study as children classified as not 'normally' progressing are the subject of the current research, which aims to investigate how children's language development is assessed and how speech and language needs are identified.

3.2 Special educational needs and disabilities

The previous sections have explored normative development and normative language development. Glazzard (2014) clarified that children's attainment levels within the early years are divided into three categories; emerging, expected or exceeding the minimum levels of attainment (see 2.8). Children who fall into the emerging category may have an additional learning need(s). Special educational needs as defined by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SENDCoP) (DfE, 2015: 16) as "a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." The definition of long-term is a condition expected to last longer than a year, and support offered to those children who are not meeting the expected levels of development. The SENDCoP states that a child has a special educational need if the support that they require to meet expected levels of development are "over and above that provided routinely as part of universal services" (DfE, 2015: 67). Universal services are the teaching and learning opportunities that all children have access to within the educational environment.

The SENDCoP identify four broad areas of need 1) communication and interaction 2) cognition and learning 3) social, emotional and mental health difficulties and 4) sensory and physical needs (DfE, 2015: 97-98). The primary area of need in the area that is most prevalent for each child, although children may have secondary needs that fall into another area. Speech, language and communication needs fit within the first area of need but could also fit within the second and third areas, depending on the level and severity of need(s). Therefore, for this thesis, children identified as

having an additional speech, language and communication need can also be defined as having a special educational need(s).

3.2.1 **Labelling children with the term ‘special educational need’**

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a broad label that includes diverse needs, many of which have further labels that identify the child as requiring additional help. The concept of labelling is not a new phenomenon (Broomhead, 2013; Jones, 1972). Society applies labels as a system of organisation and categorisation (Algraigray & Boyle, 2017). Labelling within a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) context is, however, complex. Ekins (2015: 93) posited the view that the term “SEND” is not a label at all, but a "social construct" that is "attached to an individual if they meet a number of clearly prescribed criteria." A summary by Burr (2015) of the term social construct, is a process by which individuals' categorise their own and other's social identities, who they are and how they fit concerning other individuals within a society. Hausstatter and Thuen (2014) explained social construction that relates to the SEND that links back to the discussion on a "norm-referenced approach" to development (see 2.9). In this regard, Hausstatter and Thuen (2014:192) argued that the concept of SEND is someone who does not meet the normal criteria and, thus, identified as a "deviant group." Society in this respect has determined levels of acceptability concerning development, and any development outside of these levels, are therefore not acceptable, leading to the construct of terms like special educational needs.

Historically labels depicted "exceptional children" explained Jones (1972: 2) and encompassed a wide range of socially perceived disadvantages, including “mentally retarded, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally deprived.” Jones (1972) therefore sought to bring attention to the purpose of labels and the impact that labels could have on the individual child. Labels could become a “self-fulfilling prophecy” and Jones (1972: 12) cautioned that parents and children could come to accept the status quo. More significantly, the label could project an image of an incapable child unable to do specific

tasks, and therefore, discouraging the teacher from encouraging the child (Jones, 1972).

A benefit of labelling is that it helped to provide targeted provision that supported individual needs under a particular category (Norwich, 2014). However, Norwich (2014) identified that labelling has a cycle. The label loses specificity when used increasingly before grey areas blur the original categorisation. The blurring of categorisations leads to more use of the label and several children being "diagnosed" with a disorder that may not historically be considered a condition and relates to the "problematisation of the normal" (Armstrong, 1995: 396). The original purpose of defining and identifying children with an SEND was to help provide tailored support to bridge perceived gaps in development. Armstrong's (1995) point was that through attempting to identify developmental norms, anything outside of this definition is considered abnormal and therefore in need of fixing. Armstrong (1995), therefore, suggested that tension lies with the calculation of developmental norms and whether this is a useful measurement, or whether it serves to create labels or perceived deficits where there previously was no need. Therefore, Mackelprang and Salsgiver (2016) indicated that the priority is on treating the individual and operates on the premise that the person requires fixing rather than concentrating on ways to adjust the environment to the child's needs (Bolt, 2015).The deficit model identified fits with the medical model of disability where the aim is to "fix, cure, accommodate or perhaps endure" the alleged disability (Andrews et al. 2000: 259).

This section has explored the use of labels for children not achieving expected levels of development, concluding that normalisation and standardisation measures that serve to support a child's development could be detrimental. The use of a label to identify an SEN can send the message that the child requires "fixing" that can become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jones, 1972). The implications to the current study are that children with identified SLCN are considered to have a SEND that requires support in some way to help them to achieve at the expected rate of development. The

next section explores the challenges of labelling children with an identified SLCN.

3.2.2 Labelling speech, language and communication needs

The previous section explored the use of labelling for children with a SEND(s). The following section explores the use of labels for children with SLCN. Baker and Cantwell (1987) advised caution in providing labels to children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), as the margin for error in the early years of development can be sensitive, leading to either false positives or false negatives. A child misidentified as having an SLCN is known as a false-positive, and a child misidentified as not having an SLCN is known as a false-negative. Nelson et al. (2006: 309) explained that a false positive could “erroneously label children with normal speech and language as impaired” and a false negative could miss children with an SLCN. Nelson et al. (2006) further expanded this point and suggested that labelling a child with an SLCN can cause anxiety for both children and families when a false-positive result occurs. Bishop et al. (2017: 3) investigated the use of terminology and labelling to identify language-related conditions, finding that interpretations of the word ‘disorder’ could be perceived negatively leading to lower standards on the part of workers promoting education. Concerning the current study, children who are misidentified with a SLCN may experience anxiety, although, conversely, those children who are not identified or labelled may miss out on essential support.

3.3 Identification of speech, language and communication needs

The following section explores the identification of SLCN. The section explores the challenges of identification and investigates associated aspects such as gender, second language learners and comorbid factors that are thought to contribute to understanding of SLCN in young children.

Policy documents over recent years have emphasised the importance of identification and early intervention of SLCN (Allen, 2011; Bercow, 2008; Bercow, 2018; Tickell, 2011). Bercow (2008) warned of the risks of late identification of SLCN for a child's long-term development (see 2.5.5). Early screening of SLCN would aid identification and provide opportunities for early intervention and raise the point that parental screening might be a useful resource (Eadie et al. 2010). Dohmen et al. (2016) proposed that it is possible to identify groups of children who may be susceptible to SLCN. Although Lindsay et al. (2010: 25) agreed that early identification is essential, stated there *"*is no single method*"* for the screening of SLCN. The current models available measure a range of biological and environmental factors. However, none of the existing models within the literature can accurately identify specific children who may be at risk. The lack of a specific measure makes screening for language delays difficult.

Reilly et al. (2009) tracked the language trajectory of 1720 two-year-old children as part of the ELVS. The researchers aimed to identify potential markers to enable the prediction of persistent delays. Male children and family background were the two factors related to poorer outcomes. However, the authors concluded that the results from this study were not conclusive and therefore not useful to help with screening processes for SLCN. Other similar studies supported the findings of the Reilly et al. (2009) study, which showed the difficulty of predicting long-term delay in children (see Bishop et al. 2012, Ghassabian et al. 2014; Henrichs et al. 2013; Law et al. 2012; Reilly et al. 2010). The results from Reilly et al.'s (2009) study added to the body of knowledge on predictable factors of SLCN, therefore, although the findings were not conclusive, the findings provided opportunities to narrow down the variable factors for further research.

Although language development can follow a typical trajectory for many children, some children do not develop typical language development patterns (Everitt et al. 2013). A range of factors can disrupt language development, such as physiological, physical, cognitive, and social and environmental factors. Physiological factors relate to an impairment in the

five senses: visual, hearing, tactile, smell, or taste and would impact on a child's speech, language and communication development (Bayat, 2016: 368). Variations in physical development that relate to the muscles required for oral speech and language can influence the development of speech (Buckley, 2003: 77). Cognitive factors that could impact speech and language development include impairments in *"*phonological and pragmatic skills……and auditory short-term memory skills*"* (Richards et al. 2014: 172). Social and environmental factors such as socioeconomic status and living situation can impact a child's language development trajectory as children need positive interactions to support language development (Korpilahti et al. 2016). These factors could cause a delay (Gardner, 2006) or disordered speech (Bishop et al. 2017).

Identification when there is a cause for concern varies according to the literature. The identification of language delay in young children can be difficult for several reasons. Bishop and Edmundson's (1987) article discussed the theory of maturational lag, suggesting that all children develop language at similar rates. However, delayed children start at a later point. In this theory, language develops on a similar trajectory to typically developing peers, but at later chronological ages, and therefore, although the child progresses, delays continue compared to their typically developing peers. Maturational lag implies that the child would always struggle in age-related testing, therefore, suggests that a solution might be to delay the testing age to produce a more favourable test score. The discussion raises a broader issue of an education system designed around a chronological age rather than a developmental stage (see 2.5.2) (Brooks, 2005).

In addition to chronological age, research has explored the link between SLCN and comorbid conditions. Comorbid overlaps may make it difficult for professionals to isolate the primary condition according to Lindsay et al. (2008). A study by Lindsey et al. (2011) found that local authorities did not differentiate between those children with behavioural and emotional difficulties and those with communication needs, although the two conditions can appear together. There is a high correlation of children who have

behavioural difficulties that also have communication needs (Bishop & Snowling 2004; Pinborough- Zimmerman et al. 2007; Willinger et al. 2003). The suggestion is children have difficulty in verbalising or expressing their feelings to others because of their language skills and ability to control their behaviour (Bishop et al. 2012; Law et al. 2012a; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013;).

Gender has also been a factor in several studies relating to the identification of SLCN. Snowling et al.'s (2016) research highlighted that boys were more likely to persist with language difficulties than girls. These results correlated with the earlier research of Mroz and Letts (2008), which found that there was a 4:1 ratio of boys to girls in the specific examples provided by the 50 participants. A later study by Mcleod et al. (2017) involved a sample of 275 children from across 45 preschools, where the setting referred the child because of either parental or setting concerns relating to the child's speech and language development, of the 275 children 61.8 per cent were male. Other studies have shown similar correlations, randomly recruited participants to a study for SLCN, and there was a higher percentage of males (see Dockrell et al. 2014; Hayes et al. 2012; Meschi et al. 2010).

English as an additional Language (EAL) has also been recognised as a factor for children with SLCN. Children with EAL may be fully competent in their home language; however, struggle with English (Whiteside et al. 2016). As nurseries and schools assess children in English, it can be challenging to determine if there is an SLCN in the child's first language, if there is an SLCN with the child's second language or if there is an additional need at all (Bishop et al. 2016). Children with EAL often experience difficulties in both their home and second languages; this can present as language delay or selective mutism as the child is working through the rules of both languages (Bligh & Drury, 2015). For professionals who may not know the child's first language, it can be difficult to assess not only children's language development but also other areas of development that require verbal expansion to qualify understanding, for example, specific areas of learning within the EYFS (DfE, 2012b).

This section has explored chronological age, comorbidity, gender and EAL and concluded that there is no consistent approach to identifying or screening for SLCN. The section highlighted that children with delayed speech have a normal language pattern compared to other children but at a later chronological age (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987), indicating that if the education programme is structured at the stage of development rather than chronological age, less children would be diagnosed with SLCN (Brooks, 2005).

3.3.1 **Parents as the identifier of SLCN**

Research has highlighted that parents can identify children who are showing signs of delayed speech (Abbeduto & Boudreau, 2004; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004). Parents may determine language development based on previous experience of other children (Prelock et al. 2008). Skeat et al. (2010) found that although parental concern regarding language development was a predictor concerning seeking support, this varied across socioeconomic groups. Parents of children from higher socioeconomic statuses were more likely to seek help for language needs from four years old but not at any other age. A further finding from Skeat et al.'s (2010) research found that although some parents had concerns, they did not always seek support. An explanation for these findings could be found in an earlier study by Broomfield and Dodd (2004: 312) who explored the characteristics of children demonstrating signs of SLCN referred by different sources including health visitors, teachers, parents, school nurse, doctor and paediatrician. The findings showed that found parents from a lower socioeconomic status rarely share concerns, because either they had lower expectations of language development, or the parents did not see a concern. This point could be supported in a study by Mroz and Letts (2008), who found that eight parents out of the fifty children discussed by practitioners had identified their child as having an SLCN. It was not evident in the study, whether the parent had relayed this after another professional had identified the SLCN or if they were the primary identifier. Through an interrogation of research studies, Glascoe and Dworkin (1995) discovered that parental concern was a useful indicator

for developmental delays. However, one study by Hickson et al. (1983) involving 207 mothers, showed that of the 73 per cent of mothers reporting concerns with their child's language development, 28 per cent were identified as having undiagnosed language difficulties, showing the challenges faced by parents in understanding when to be concerned. Building trust with parents to ensure they feel comfortable sharing concerns is a fundamental part of a practitioners' role.

The parent-setting-child triad is an essential relationship for all concerned. Parents are an essential component of the support system for the child and setting. However, sometimes, parents can be vulnerable and require open and honest communication to build trust (Broomhead, 2013). Many have recognised the importance of trust (Broomhead, 2013; Everitt, 2010; Law et al. 2003; Stoner et al. 2005). Law et al. (2000) considered that relationships between parents and outside agencies can be fragile. According to Stoner et al. (2005), once trust breaks down, it may make parents more cautious and critical of support services. Stoner et al.'s (2005) research showed that once parents had experienced a break-in trust level, they felt betrayed by the professionals supporting their child, and this caused for adversarial relationships. Therefore, some LA's have tried to overcome this by building trusting relationships within the pre-school years.

Roberts and Kaiser's (2011) study reviewed the importance of parent partnerships concerning SLCN in children. Robert and Kaiser (2011) compared 18 research studies involving children from 18-60 months that included parents as facilitators of interventions for their child. The results demonstrated that children made gains in both receptive and expressive language scores after the intervention, although gains for expressive language scored higher. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between children's language development and parental intervention, and the gains were more significant when parents engaged in training.

3.3.2 **Early years practitioners as the identifier of SLCN**

Prelock et al. (2008) noted that one of the most significant challenges is that practitioners do not always understand the difference between a language delay and a language difference. The reason for the confusion is due to the different rates that children's language develops and the potential that a different condition, often presenting with similar "patterns" that could be simultaneously evident (Law et al. 2003: 2). Some practitioners are unsure of when to be concerned about a child's language development (Dockrell & Marshall, 2015; Locke et al. 2002). Similarly, Nicholson and Palaiologou's (2016) research highlighted that practitioners were not confident in their skills in identifying language needs and is supported by others (National Literacy Trust, 2005). The findings correlated with the earlier Mroz and Letts (2008) study that demonstrated that of the 50 early years participants whom all worked with children identified with an SLCN, only 15 identified the SLCN themselves. These studies are significant to the current study that is seeking to explore practitioners' experiences of identifying SLCN.

3.3.3 **Health visitors as the identifier of SLCN**

Health visitors will use a more simplified method of establishing language development, for example, during a two-year progress check, parents are asked two questions: "a) can your child put two or more words together? (b) can your child say at least 50 words?" (Wilson et al. 2013: 2). The lack of a uniformed approach to identify a language need can make identification difficult, as what might constitute an SLCN to one person might not to another. A two-year progress check was introduced and came into force in 2012, following a pilot in 2011 (Tickell, 2011). The two-year progress check was later replaced in 2015 with the Integrated Review at Age Two that 'merged the Progress Check at Age Two and the Healthy Child Programme' (DfE, 2015; Nicholson & Palaiologou, 2016:3). The design of the integrated two-year progress check included completion in partnership with the child's keyworker in a nursery setting; therefore, only applies when a child regularly

attends early years provision (Featherstone, 2013). The two-year examination by the health visitor can, therefore, be the only time the language development of the child is evaluated.

The original aim of the progress check was to identify strengths and weaknesses in a child's prime areas (Tickell, 2011). The assessment based in the first instance, on observations and assessments, is undertaken by the child's key person (Paton, 2012). The intention was that this provided a more realistic picture of the child's development than a check that is conducted by a health visitor who may not have a relationship with the child or may not have the time to visit due to the heavy workloads discussed (Baldwin et al. 2014). Section 3.3 have demonstrated that the primary identifiers of an SLCN all use a different approach to detect SLCN in young children. The different approaches may add to the confusion of what SLCN means and how it might be identified consistently across different primary identifiers. The following section explores some of the government initiatives to aid practitioners' understanding of language development.

3.4 Government initiatives to aid early years practitioners in identifying SLCN

Several initiatives have been developed over the years to help practitioners working with young children to identify and support early speech and language skills; however, these initiatives can be short-lived and rely on government funding (Afasic, 2015; Cassidy, 2012). Limits to government funding means initiatives rarely reach the whole country, often isolating towns and cities to act as pilots and then not being developed for the country. Some initiatives are trialled and then stopped after the pilot stages because of changes in government agendas or changes to the funding criteria (McLeod, 2011). Short-lived initiatives have meant that training and supporting those professionals working daily with children, are fragmented, and lacking in rigour as discussed previously in the chapter (Mroz & Hall, 2003; Mroz & Letts, 2008).

An example of a government-funded initiative was the Early Language Development Programme (ELDP). The ELDP was set up by ICAN and was in force from 2011 to March 2015 (OPM, 2015). The program aimed to improve practitioners' knowledge and understanding of the language and speech development of children under the age of five (OPM, 2015). The programme used a cascaded approach by training 1157 practitioners, to deliver speech and language training to early years professionals. The estimated reach of the programme at the time of the report was “16,000 early years practitioner's and family-facing professionals” who supported 150,000 parents and carers. The programme had eight leading key performance indicators (KPI) with six of the eight achieved. The first missing KPIs was targeted at 95 per cent of leading practitioners feeling comfortable about sharing knowledge with other early years providers. The findings revealed that 89 per cent of respondents felt secure that their experience was shared with other early years providers. The second missed KPI was for 125 lead practitioners to the programme to gain a level four qualification and 111 lead practitioners gained qualifications. Although the evaluation of the report discusses increased confidence in supporting children's language development from practitioners’ and parents’ perspectives, there was no follow up study to explore the long-term impact of the programme. Without follow-up studies, it is difficult to assess whether the results were temporary or had a longer-lasting impact. However, the literature highlighted the importance of funding and continued government support in language related initiatives to aid practitioners understanding and skills in the identification and assessment of communication and language.

3.5 Existing tools for identification and assessment of speech and language

This section evaluates some of the tools currently used by practitioners, in comparison to the Preschool Language Scale- 4 used by some speech and language therapists. The aim is to explore the validity and specificity of the tools when used in practice. Table 4 demonstrates some of the tools available to assess speech, language and communication development and provides an overview of the methods of assessment, the target age of the

child and the targeted assessor. Each of the tools are discussed in the following sections.

Table 4: Range of available tools to assess language development

Tool	Methods	Child age	Target assessor
Preschool Language Scale (PLS-4)	Tasks and tests	Birth to 6 years 5 months	Speech and language therapists early education specialists
EYFS: Development measures Communication and Language ages and stages	Observation, two year progress check, Early years foundation stage profile Development Tracker	0-5	Early years practitioners Teachers Teaching assistants
Wellcomm Toolkit	observation, discussion with parents and carers and direct testing	6 months to six years	Practitioner
Every Child a Talker	Observation Checklists Tasks	Birth to five	Early years practitioner Parent

3.5.1 **Preschool Language Scale (PLS-4)**

The PLS-4 is a test used with children from birth to six years and 11 months (Zimmerman & Castilleja, 2005). The test includes tasks at different ages to assess language level in both receptive and expressive areas. Anyone who has had specific PLS-4 training can administer the test that takes around 20-40 minutes to complete with high levels of specificity and validity reported when compared to other similar language measures (Zimmerman & Castilleja, 2005). The limitations of the tool are that it provides a snapshot assessment and is not detailed as it covers a wide range of areas in a short space of time (Zimmerman & Castilleja, 2005). Although the authors state that SLT and early education specialists can administer the test, the guidance does not state practitioners or teachers, and therefore practitioners may not have the skills to administer the test correctly. Also, the PLS-4 is a

package and therefore requires settings to purchase it. Therefore, this section serves as a control tool to measure the EYFS and Wellcomm approaches against.

3.5.2 EYFS: development measures Communication and Language ages and stages

The primary tool for assessing language development in early years settings, is the EYFS Development Matters documentation (DfE, 2012b). The EYFS involves identifying the child's current chronological age and current stage of development, against a list of descriptors known as Early Learning Goals (ELG), to help practitioners working with children, to identify the child's current stage of language development (DfE, 2012b). The ages and stages of the EYFS deliberately overlap to acknowledge that children develop at different rates. The broad age bands guide children's development not only by age but also by the child's stage of development. The overlaps exist to acknowledge that there are situations when the child's chronological age and stage of development do not always correlate (Holland & Doherty, 2016; Mengoni & Oates, 2013; Osgood, 2014). Practitioners have raised concerns over the subjectivity of the EYFS and suggest that different practitioners assess children differently against the ELG's (see 2.8) (Brooker et al. 2010).

3.5.3 Wellcomm Toolkit

Wellcomm is a screening tool that skilled, and non-skilled practitioners can use. The screening involves observation, direct testing and parent/carer discussions (Communication Trust with GL Assessment, 2011). A traffic light system highlights areas of concern, with red indicating the need for specialist support. Limited studies have been conducted around the Wellcomm Toolkit, although a study by Seager and Abbot-Smith (2017) explored the effectiveness of the EYFS to assess children's language development. Two different measures were used with 70 children from between 30 and 35 months of age: the EYFS and the Wellcomm Toolkit. A comparison of the

Wellcomm and the EYFS test results with the PLS-4 results to assess each instrument's specific characteristics. The results showed that there was a "weak correlation" to the PLS-4 in all early learning goals within the communication and language area of the EYFS. The results evidenced that 16 per cent of the children identified as delayed by the PLS-4, were placed in the 'expected' bracket for the child's chronological age by practitioners using the EYFS. The results indicate that the practitioner assessed the child's language as typical for the child's age. The findings could show that the EYFS does not provide an accurate assessment measure and therefore requires refining. Suggesting that an additional tool for the assessment of speech and language is needed or that practitioners require additional training to apply the EYFS correctly. The results also demonstrated there was no "significant relationship between the 'understanding' section of the EYFS and the PLS-4" (Seager & Abbot-Smith, 2017: 75). This finding was identified in earlier research by McKean et al. (2011:24) claiming that “the EYFSP [Early Years Foundation Stage Profile] alone cannot be relied upon to accurately identify children with language ….. difficulties.”

Conversely, the results from the Wellcomm assessment showed a good correlation to the PLS-4. The authors deduced from the findings that practitioners' levels of experience and training were not a factor when using the Wellcomm assessment tool; however, it was a factor when using the EYFS for assessment. The limitation of this method is that the setting must purchase the Wellcomm package (GL Assessment, 2017-18), and as highlighted earlier, the sector is struggling to remain sustainable and therefore, additional costs for assessment tools might not be an option.

3.5.4 **Every Child a Talker**

The Every Child a Talker programme (ECaT) (DCSF 2008a) was designed to train practitioners about language development as a process of reflective pedagogy. However, it developed into an assessment tool with materials for trained Early Language Lead Practitioners (ELLP) to assess children’s

language (McLeod, 2011). The principle thought was that training ELLP's would create knowledge exchange with other practitioners within the setting. Jenkinsons' (2013) doctoral study involved investigating the oral language support practices of settings with ECaT trained practitioners. Jenkinsons' (2013) results were based on observations, interviews and questionnaires of 18 early years settings, nine were from ECaT training settings and nine were a control group of non-ECaT trained settings. The results showed that while the programme increased the confidence in the identification and support of children at the individual practitioner level, it did not have a setting broad impact because of difficulties disseminating the training information (Jenkinson, 2013). The funding ceased, and the government discontinued the ECaT in 2010 (Law et al. 2017). Nelson et al. (2006) highlighted that there is a need for a consistent process to identify children with a language delay.

3.6 Specific training for communication and language professionals

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that practitioners struggle to identify children who may have a language difficulty (Dockrell et al. 2006; Dockrell & Marshall, 2015; Letts & Hall 2003; Prelock et al. 2008). As discussed in section 2.9.2 research by Prelock et al. (2008) found that practitioners struggled to understand the differences in terminology relating to SLCN. The previous section highlighted the primary tool that practitioners used to assess children's language development is the EYFS Development Matters guidance (DfE, 2012b) and the challenges that this assessment tool poses. This section explores specific training for communication and language development for practitioners.

Research into specific training for practitioners in speech and language appears limited. However, as discussed in section's 2.6 and 3.4 training for practitioners is generally inconsistent. The significance of the gaps in training is explicitly evident in the confidence levels of practitioners in supporting children with SLCN (Hall, 2005). The main piece of research cited in this section was by Mroz and Hall (2003). Other articles that discuss the training

needs of practitioners refer to this specific research (see Dockrell & Howell, 2015; Hall, 2005; Letts & Hall, 2003; Mroz, 2006; Mroz & Letts, 2008; Scarinci et al. 2015; Whiteley et al. 2005).

Hall's (2005) research found that many of the courses designed for practitioners, did not contain speech, language or communication modules and if covered at all, it was on a superficial level. Mroz and Hall (2003) highlighted the issue of the lack of training in their research involving 829 practitioners from both PVI and school-based provision. The findings showed that 47.7 per cent of practitioners felt that the training that they had received on communication and language was adequate. The term 'adequate', however, is a value judgement and can have a different meaning depending on the person. To illustrated this point further, Mroz and Hall (2003) found that 9.7 per cent of practitioners had less than one hours training, although conversely, 47.3 per cent of practitioners had over eight hours of training. The training appeared to focus on normative language patterns, with 78.9 per cent of participants stating that non-specialist tutors delivered the training. The finding implied that the training could be delivered by tutors who may not answer specific questions or provide specific examples to support the training. The discussion over the importance or lack thereof, for specialist tutors, is debated by Fisher and Webb (2006) who argued that it is not always practical or possible for students to have access to subject-specific tutors, due to the wide-ranging topics taught in further education. Conversely, Lucas et al. (2013) asserted that specialist teachers are required to cover the depth and breadth of the topic.

A further 72.8 per cent of the practitioners within the Mroz and Hall (2003) research, had received no training on additional language needs, and 62.8 per cent discussed not receiving any post-qualification training on speech and language. A contrasting study by Blackburn (2014) with 64 participants across a range of settings, showed that 59 out of the 64 participants had received training for speech and language, however, the depth and level of training varied, with 27 participants receiving training for less than two days and 32 participants receiving training that spanned from six days to a year.

The difference in results could be attributed to the amount of time between the studies of 11 years. As discussed in section 2.5.5, political attention in the years between the two cited studies, focussed on the importance of speech, language and communication skills to children's long-term development (Bercow, 2008). However, the Mroz and Hall (2003) and Blackburn (2014) studies showed the variability of the training that is accessed by practitioners in their related research, despite the difference of more than a decade. The similarity in findings suggested that although speech, language and communication has been a consistent issue raised in government health and education sectors, inconsistency still exists in training received by practitioners.

Furthermore, the research by Mroz and Hall (2003) identified that even those practitioners who recognised themselves as confident in their understanding of language development were not always able to correctly identify a child who should receive a referral for language support. The Letts and Hall (2003) study provided practitioners with three case studies; it required the practitioners to stipulate whether the child in each case study required a referral with only one-quarter of the participants providing the correct answer for all children. The lack of understanding when to refer a child to language support shows that practitioners may misunderstand their skills. However, with no clear guidance on specific normative or atypical language development, determining the precise skill level could be difficult.

Hall's (2005: 12) research established that early years training invested "very little time" or resources to developing early years students' knowledge and understanding of language development. The oversight is not limited to the early years; Ivanic and Simpson (2013) highlighted that teachers in primary education also have limited knowledge of speech and language development. A key issue raised by Rhodes and Huston (2012), is that even with skilled practitioners, there are often gaps in certain areas of expertise. The studies of Mroz and Hall (2003) and Blackburn (2014) could show that communication and language development understanding is one of those gaps.

To fully support young children's language development, Mroz (2012), posited that practitioners first need an understanding of normative language trajectory. Law et al. al. (2000: vi) also identified practitioners' understanding of normative language trajectory and advocated for the development of *"*accredited training programs which are delivered and attended by the different professional groups*."* Such was the emphasis on training for all staff working with children who had been identified with a language need, that it was one of the 18 recommendations of the final report by Law et al. (2000). The recommendation for accredited speech and language programmes did not receive government support; therefore, there still appears to be a gap in communication and language training for professionals working on a day to day basis with children.

External training to increase practitioners' skills can be problematic because of the current sector sustainability issues (Gaunt, 2018a). The setting cannot always cover the cost of sending practitioners on training due to the cost of the course and the cost to cover the practitioner to maintain adult: child ratios (Gaunt, 2018a). Some practitioners may self-fund courses; however, this may involve losing pay for the time off besides covering the cost of the course, and many practitioners cannot afford to pay for courses on a minimum wage.

This section described an inconsistent approach in the training opportunities available for practitioners to improve their understanding of language development for children. The section concluded that although practitioners may be skilled and qualified to a high level, there may be gaps in expertise that can impact on their ability to assess, identify and support children with SLCN.

3.7 Support

The following section discusses the support available to assist practitioners in their roles. Support for children with identified SLCN involves external and internal intervention strategies. External support refers to outside agencies that the individual setting can access or link into, usually through a referral process. This section identifies the potential support avenues through speech and language therapy services and the local education authority. Internal support refers to the mechanisms available within the setting that practitioners can access to help them to support the child. The section discusses these mechanisms and difficulties of supporting children in a time of austerity that has resulted in funding cuts in addition to high staff turnover.

3.7.1 Intervention

Intervention refers to the support provided to help a child with one or more areas of their development (DfE, 2015). An intervention could be an activity that focuses on a specific area of need defined within the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015). Interventions may include specific strategies offered by external services such as language therapy and speech services. Reilly et al. (2010), concluded that early intervention should focus on all children who show low language levels. Wankoff (2011: 175) advised that early identification is key to ensuring maximum success of intervention strategies and resulting in reduced difficulties with both literacy and social, emotional development in later life. Similarly, Bishop et al. (2012) provided a neurological argument to support early identification and intervention by pointing out that two-year-old brains have high plasticity; therefore, it is easier to shape development. Bates (1999) research supported the neurological argument through the study of infants with brain injuries. Bates (1999) research showed that the plasticity of the brain at this age enabled the mapping of new language pathways in the brain. The mapping of new pathways shows the possibility that early identification and intervention is optimal from around two-years-

old. Research has shown that for children who present as delayed but carry on to 'recover' language within standardised measures, still do not score as well in language-related tasks as other typically developing children (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Paul, 1996; Rescorla et al. 2000; Snowling et al. 2016; Stothard, et al.1998; Whitehurst & Fischel, 1994). These findings indicate that all children identified with an SLCN would benefit from intervention from when the delay or difficulty has been identified (Law et al. 1998; Paul, 2007; Ukoumunne et al. 2012).

The purpose of intervention for speech and language needs is to ensure that children and young people can improve communicative exchanges to positively impact on all aspects of life, including relationships and academic success (McCormack et al. 2018). For example, to access the curriculum, the child must be able to have the same language skills as other 'typically' developing peers (Dockrell et al. 2015). To achieve well in standardised tests, children need to have a standard level of language skills. To support children towards this goal, early years settings structure the provision where possible to support children as discussed in the following section.

3.7.2 **Internal support**

Within early years settings, internal support for SLCN begins with observations to assess the child's current stage of development as discussed earlier in the chapter. The completion of a pre-assessment plan follows the graduated response of assess, plan, do, review process outlined in the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015:86). Throughout the process, the child's key person ensures that the plan is followed and supported by the setting's SENDCo (Tutt & Williams, 2015). A review of the original plan by an agreed date is set to see if the child has met the agreed targets (Cowne et al. 2015). If the child has not met the targets, the key person and SENDCo will review the process, possibly by trying different approaches (Coulter et al. 2015). If the child has made progress, new targets are agreed. The process is expected to rotate through at least four cycles unless the interventions are working and then the process will continue to be reviewed until support is no longer required (DfE,

2015). If, however, the “child continues to make less than expected progress” (DfE, 2015: 87), the key person and SENDCo will need to discuss what they will do next to support the child.

Some LAs will use a form to document what the cause for concern is, however, the process from this point can vary depending upon the LA, the level of support the settings get and the settings internal procedures. If completing a support form, the details must include the steps the setting has already taken in supporting the child, the progress achieved, and what the next steps might be; this may lead to targeted intervention. A support plan would typically be completed and should be written from the child’s perspective and with the child’s parents. Previously, the process involved formally recording the steps taken in an individual education plan, and some LA’s and settings may still use it (Tutt & Williams, 2015). After four cycles over four months, the process then moves to intensive intervention unless there is an immediate reason to move the intervention level before this. Intensive intervention may require external support.

The section above describes the general process for all areas of need. Children with SLCN may require specific interventions. Interventions can involve the setting providing specific activities to support the child, ranging from strategies such as introducing friendship groups to help encourage a child to communicate, the use of visuals, structured activities on a one-to-one basis with the child’s key person to embed and encourage language skills. Vakil et al. (2009) discussed the strategies used within settings to support children with communication difficulties and stated that practitioners adopt multiple roles within the setting to support children with a diverse range of needs.

The challenges of any intervention within the setting is the time to do the intervention effectively. In addition, some early years, practitioners lack the confidence and skills to support language interventions within the setting (Mroz & Hall, 2003; Mroz & Letts, 2008). Also, low pay remains a challenge to the recruitment and retention of early years staff making it challenging to

offer continuity to children (Gaunt, 2020a; McAlees, 2019). The high turnover of staff also created a skills deficit in individual settings, where staff with specific skill sets leave and are difficult to replace (McAlees, 2019; NDNA, 2020). The causes of staff turnover include stress caused by increased workload with a survey showing that *"*one in four early years practitioners are considering leaving the sector due to mental health problems" (Gaunt, 2018c). Staff turnover and *"*stagnant funding levels" from the government has meant that settings had to explore ways of keeping costs down and has ultimately impacted on the provision that settings can offer children (Russell, 2018).

This section identified that there may be challenges within practice to support speech and language interventions for children. The lack of training, staff turnover and funding are barriers faced by practitioners in providing targeted support for children within the setting. Besides internal intervention there may be external support and funding that the practitioners can access to support the needs of children within the setting and is explored in the following section.

3.7.3 **External support and funding**

External support is any support available to the early years setting. This section summarises the support that settings may receive; however, note that external support services are subject to LA objectives and funding. The Children Act 2004 made a requirement that a Director of Children's Services (DCS) and a Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) must be appointed for each local authority (DfE, 2013b). The primary role (among others) of the DCS and LMCS is to ensure that the services within their local authority "address the needs of all children and young people*"* (DfE, 2013b: 5), and ensure that effectively managed budgets and funding support children's *"*health, social care and education*"* (DfE, 2013b: 9).

The demographics of LA's is unique; therefore, funding allocation and services can differ. Local authority spending is subject to influence by the

national government and the needs of the area that the authority is responsible for as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 (DfE, 2018b). Parish and Bryant (2015) explained that within the central government is the Education Funding Agency responsible for education funding allocation. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocated education funding through the distribution to four blocks (DfE, 2017b). The four blocks are: the school block; the early years block; the high needs (SEN) block and more recently, the central school services block. Funds allocated to each block, based on a national funding formula, that includes a basic rate per pupil depending on age, additional needs funding that includes elements of deprivation, low attainment level, English as an additional language and mobility (DfE, 2017b). Local authorities have the autonomy to move the allocated funding between the different DSG blocks, although recent changes have meant that school funding is now ring-fenced. The reduced flexibility for ring-fence funds by LA's should lead to the use of funding for the originally assigned purposes. The LA does, however, have a small amount of flexibility and can use 0.5 per cent of the funding for other purposes but only if the school forum agrees to the move (DfE, 2017b). However, the early years block and the high needs block are not ring-fenced, which suggests that the funding from these blocks could move for purposes other than the initial intention. Concerning the current study, this shows how different LAs can choose how and where to allocate funds within the DSG blocks, although LAs must pass on the *"*majority of the early years block to early years providers," this is subjective (DfE, 2017b: 6). Determining a 'majority' figure is ambiguous; anything under 51 per cent might meet this aim, and therefore shows the challenge of receiving funding to support children. Besides the application for additional funding, speech and language therapy services may be an avenue that could be explored to support the children within the setting and is discussed in the following section.

3.7.4 **Speech and language therapy services**

The background of speech and language therapy (SLT) services has undergone political changes concerning where the service sits within the local authority. Originally, SLT services were education-based, working closely within educational establishments; however, changes meant that SLT services shifted to become the remit of the National Health Service (Law et al. 2000: 5). The original mode of delivery for SLT was clinic-based; however, this changed when research identified that children learn new skills in meaningful contexts (Law et al. 2000). Clinic-based intervention approaches occur in a context that is not natural or familiar to the child, and therefore, can aid towards a child's anxiety levels and impact the success of the intervention. A meaningful context refers to places and interventions that hold meaning to the child. The focus on meaningful contexts created a further paradigm shift where speech and language therapists, would often work out in the field, in schools and settings to support children within familiar environments (Law et al. 1998). Concerning the current study, SLT support would also be offered within the early years setting, in clinics or support provided in the parents own home depending upon the LA. Cuts to funding have impacted on the services that are available to support children (Brady, 2019; Longfield, 2019) (see 2.5.5).

Hall (2005) stated that in SLT services, children's needs go through a process of prioritisation, working on the principle that children with higher levels of need are seen first, potentially delaying support for other children. Prioritisation policies demonstrated in an article by Parveen (2019) who reported that although the DCG funding through the High Needs block has risen by eight per cent in the North of England, the number of children requiring support has increased by 39 per cent. There was a limited budget and therefore, was not sufficient to cover all the services needed to support a child adequately. A child identified as requiring support places a responsibility on the education setting, who assess the level of support needed as set out in the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015) and could, therefore, explain why there may be

delays within the identification and support process. As discussed in section 3.6, speech and language development spans both health and education authorities. The following section explores the support that may be available for practitioners from the local authority.

3.7.5 **Local authority early years support**

Each local authority has an obligation under the Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 to provide childcare provision for working families, limit restrictions on providers of government-funded education places and “provide information, advice and training to childcare providers” (DfE, 2018b: 5). The guidance does not stipulate specific training courses, how much or how often, however, the guidance states that LAs cannot force a provider to undertake any training unless it was an Ofsted stipulation in response to an inspection, where the provider received a grade less than ‘good’ (DfE, 2018b:23). The guidance also details mandatory duties of the LA concerning supporting early years settings and includes ensuring that information, training and advice to newly registered providers or providers who have not met the minimum Ofsted requirement of ‘good’. Information, training and support can be provided at the discretion of the LA to good and outstanding settings and depends on the level of the provider’s needs. The guidance, therefore, shows that the LA can determine the level of support they will offer for those settings who are rated ‘good’ or above by Ofsted (DfE, 2018b). As stated earlier in the chapter, the funding formulas require that the LA must ensure that most funds go directly to the provider, and this could, therefore, be a barrier to additional support structures offered to providers as budgets may be set.

The implications are that the level of support early years providers receive is variable depending upon the LA. Some LAs have early years teams that support all providers within the area and invest in training, provide support and advice through trained quality officers. They provide practical support during the pre-assessment process to set realistic targets and help to set up support interventions, up to and including the Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) if required. The team act as a conduit for referrals to other

support services, for example, speech and language therapists and a range of other professionals who may support the child and the setting further. The team may also offer additional financial support to the setting, to enable the enhanced ratios for those children who have yet to secure an EHCP but require more focused intervention than is possible with the standard ratios offered within the setting. Quarterly meetings with other settings set up by the LA can also form part of the information and advice offered. Other LA's provide the same services but only to those settings that fall below 'good' in an Ofsted inspection.

This section has identified and defined intervention as the support provided to help a child with one or more areas of their development. The section concluded that barriers to internal and external interventions such as the prioritisation and allocation of available funding, cuts to funding, practitioner confidence and high staff turnover has impacted the support available to children.

3.8 Impact of speech, language and communication needs

Research has shown that for those children identified as delayed but carry on to 'recover' language within a reasonable range in standardised measures (Paul & Roth, 2011; Buschmann et al. 2009; Rescorla, 2000), still do not score as well in language-related tasks as other typically developing children (Rescorla et al. 2000; Snowling et al. 2016; Stothard et al. 1998). Recovery refers to children identified with SLCN that later achieve normative language ranges on standardised tests (see 3.7.1). Research has shown that language can 'recover' by the time a child is five years old, with no targeted interventions (Dale et al. 2003; Elman et.al. 1998; Reilly et al. 2006). Therefore, the fluctuating levels of language development in the preschool years can make it challenging to determine which children are likely to persist with language difficulties (Everitt et al. 2013; Law et al. 2012a; Ukoumunne et al. 2012).

Research into the long-term impact of SLCN has highlighted fluctuating language levels. Rescorla and Swartz (1990) found during a follow-up study with a cohort of 25 boys that fifty per cent of the children identified with a language delay at 24-31 months still exhibited delays around 12 to 18 months later. Paul et al.'s (1997) study involving 32 children found that sixteen per cent of the children continued to have persistent delays at seven to eight years old. A similar study by Bishop et al. (2012) found that out of a cohort of 58 children identified as late talkers at 18 months old, around 25 per cent still had persistent language delays at four years old. It is important to note that these studies utlised small sample sizes and therefore may not be generalisable. Similarly, Snowling et al.'s (2016) research involved a longitudinal study of 220 children identified as having a language impairment in preschool. The study involved assessing children at three and a half, five and a half, six and a half, eight and nine years old. In 78 per cent of cases, the language impairment continued to be a factor by the time the child was eight years old. The results showed that 22 per cent of cases had resolved by the time of the study, with children scoring within a typical range for their age in language-related tests. The results show that while the language range appears to 'recover', language mastery continues to cause problems for the child within their academic life. Reilly et al. (2013) concluded that the reported rates of language recovery fluctuate depending upon the study. Language mastery is essential to a child's academic life because the curriculum builds on a system that tests understanding and knowledge through language-based tests (Becker, 2011). The current education system requires children to prove knowledge through the completion of written and oral testing that rely on expressive and receptive understanding (Dockrell et al. 2011; Gregg et al. 2013; STA, 2015).

Scarborough and Dobrich's (1990) research findings into children with SLCN's, suggested that children who have appeared to have 'recovered' language, later plateau. Typically developing peers will experience an increase in communication ability, whereas, the child labelled delayed does not, thus, creating a gap between the two groups. The process of a child with identified SLCN who later achieved normative ranges in standardised testing,

to show language deficits in language-based tasks is known as illusionary recovery (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1990: 70). The Scarborough and Dobrich (1990) study involved a small sample size of four participants. Of the four children involved, three children continued to have persistent language difficulties that impacted on their reading ability. There has been much debate as to whether illusionary recovery exists (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Dale et al. 2014; Duff et al. 2015; Snowling et al. 2016; Stothard et al.1998). Studies by Bishop and Adams (1990) and Dale et al. (2014) found no conclusive evidence that illusionary recovery takes place, whereas a study by Stothard et al. (1998) found some evidence to support this claim. Stothard et al.'s (1998: 417) study involved 71 children; of the 71 children, 52 per cent categorised as delayed or late talkers, went on to 'recover' a typical language range evidenced through achieving similar scores in spoken language tests as their typically developing peers. However, this 52 per cent, achieved "lower word composite scores" than their typically developing peers in literacy. The finding suggests that while vocabulary range appears to recover, understanding and comprehension is still affected and therefore supports the findings of Scarborough and Dobrich (1990).

Recovery rates can make the identification of language delay difficult for both practitioners and speech and language therapists. Often, a wait and see approach is adopted to allow children to recover speech on their own without intervention (Rice et al. 2008). The wait and see approach can, however, cause problems for children later in their language development, and it is difficult to know which children are likely to recover and which children are not (Everitt et al. 2013). The watchful waiting begins with six months of observation, to see what happens, and if a child develops speech independently or not (Nelson et al. 2006). If there has been little or no significant improvement at that point, SLT services may accept a referral (Ellis & Thal, 2008). However, the SENDCoP requires the graduated approach to be applied for some time, typically two school terms, with interventions attempted within the setting before a referral can take place (DfE, 2015). The delay in referring children, added to the long waiting lists to be seen by SLT as highlighted earlier, often means that children are

experiencing longer waiting times to gain support. Waiting lists can affect the long-term development of children because early SLCN intervention aims to improve children's long-term impact.

3.8.1 The impact on attainment

Law (2009) showed through the study discussed earlier involving 17,196 participants tracked at different stages of their lives, were four times more likely to have long-term reading difficulties into adulthood and twice as likely to be unemployed than peers without a language difficulty. Other studies have explored the correlation between young offenders and SLCN. Bryan (2004) found in a cohort of 30 young offenders aged between 18 and 21 years, 73 per cent scored below the accepted range for their age in grammar, and 23 per cent were below for language comprehension. The statistics could, however, be misleading. Not all young people with SLCN will be offenders, and not all offenders will have SLCN; therefore, the results are viewed with caution.

Although the research discussed in previous sections focused primarily on children's early development, alternative research has demonstrated that the effects of an SLCN can be detrimental to life chances spanning into adulthood (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1990; Wake et al. 2012; Whitehurst & Fischel, 1994). Current government agenda's focus on closing the attainment gap between those children who are achieving significantly better outcomes on standardised tests than other children and young people, at pivotal development points (see 2.5.5) (Becker, 2011). Standardised tests take place at the end of the foundation year before the child begins formal education at five years old (EYFPS)(STA, 2015), at SATS at six to seven years and 11 years, and GSCE's at age 16 (DfE, 2016), and even into further and higher education (Gregg et al. 2013). The gap is defined by those children who achieve the highest levels of attainment and the lowest levels of attainment, with suggestions made that the gap could be due to socioeconomic status (Parsons, 2016).

Research has highlighted the links between SLCN and the impact on later literacy attainment (Catts et al. 2002; Lyytinen et al. 2005; Puolakanaho et al. 2008; Rescorla 2000, 2002, 2009). Research by Myers and Botting (2008) studied a representative group of 36 pre-adolescents in a year seven inner-city school and found that 58 per cent of the cohort studied had difficulty with comprehension and coding skills and also showed lower oral language skills. It is unknown whether the youths involved in the study were previously identified with SLCN. The results of Myers and Botting's (2008) research highlighted that language difficulty can still present in young people into secondary school and therefore, there is the potential for language difficulties to impact on school attainment.

Early language difficulties were also identified as a possible early dyslexia predictor (Puolakanaho et al. 2008; Raschle et al. 2015). However, research by Bishop and Snowling (2004) advised caution when assuming that language difficulty will lead to deficits in literacy, as the causes of SLCN has so many variables that SLCN does not equal literacy deficits. Bishop and Snowling's (2004: 864) research found that those children with speech-sound production difficulties did not have problems with literacy unless the child had other additional conditions.

3.8.2 **Social and peer relationships**

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of language development to children's social and emotional development (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016; Law et al. 2013; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013;). Recently, there has been an increase in reported cases of children with mental health-related conditions (ICAN, 2017; Law et al. 2009). Law et al.'s (2009) research explored longitudinal data from a population study of 17,196 people that collected data from children born in 1970. Law et al. (2009) tracked the children at aged five, ten, sixteen, twenty-six, thirty- and thirty-four. Law et al. (2009) analysed the data to explore literacy levels, mental health and employment. The sample split into groups of Typically Developing language (LD), specific language impairment (SLI) and nonspecific language

impairment (N-SLI). The results showed that the N-SLI group were five times more likely to have poor adult mental health than the TL group, and the SLI group were fifty per cent more likely to have poor mental health. Evidence from language clinics and some psychiatric facilities suggest that there are links between some language difficulties and later diagnosed psychiatric disorders (Brownlie et al. 2004; Dockrell et al. 2014; Pinborough-Zimmerman et al. 2007). Although there appears to be a correlation between SLCN and mental health conditions, there is no way of knowing what other factors contributed to mental health and therefore, it is challenging to say SLCN directly affected mental health.

Nevertheless, language disorder or delay can impact on children's ability to communicate and can manifest in a child's behaviour (Henrich et al. 2013; Nelson et al. 2006). Children who struggle to communicate their wants and needs can experience feelings of frustration leading to emotional outbursts (Prelock et al. 2008) and on occasions, disruptive behaviour (Yew & Kearney, 2013). This is confirmed by a study by St. Claire et al. (2019) finding that children with SLCN reported problems in social contact, emotional development and decreased capacity to self-regulate their emotions. As discussed by Willinger et al. (2003), this can cause a negative spiral concerning how the child perceives others, themselves, and their attitudes towards learning. Once set, this can impact the child's motivation to learning and social interaction potentially leading in some cases to the child developing negative feelings of self (Bakopoulou & Dockrell, 2016; Hadley & Rice, 1991).

A key aspect of social development is the interaction with others (Hadley & Rice, 1991); however, previous studies have reported that children with language difficulties are often excluded from games (Gertner et al.1994; Rice et al. 1991). Gertner (1994) endorsed this view and explained that children with SLCN are not recognised by their peers due to lack of communication ability. Furthermore, Goldstein (1992) noted that peers will choose collaborative partners who can extend and develop play themes, often narratively, therefore, will choose a playmate who has these skills. Children

often select playmates who can engage in communicative exchanges, capable of developing and extending a narrative in play situations (Law et al. 2013; Rice et al.1991). Failure to engage in this social exchange can lead the children with SLCN to become neglected in play opportunities (Rice et al. 1991). Horwitz et al. (2003) expressed the view that the inability to connect in communication exchanges with peers, further exasperates the situation as the child is included in less communication exchange opportunities and thus, fewer opportunities to develop these skills. As Willinger et al. (2003) pointed out, this can cause a 'negative social spiral' as language development requires opportunities for practice and can impact on children's emotional development (Hadley & Rice 1991; Wankoff, 2011; Young et al. 2002).

Studies such as the ELVS (Bavin et al. 2008) have identified that language delay can have far-reaching effects on children's later attainment (Clegg et al. 2005; Dockrell & Marshall, 2015; Justice et al. 2015; Law et al. 2012), social and emotional development (Blackburn & Aubrey, 2016), mental health (Conti-Ramsden et al. 2008; Dockrell et al. 2014; Pinborough-Zimmerman et al. 2007), and long term life chances (Clegg, 2006). Research by Horwitz et al. (2003) involving children aged between 12 months to 39 months, found that children who identified later with language delay, often exhibit poor social skills from as early as 18 months. Paul et al. (1991) research of 21 children from aged 18 to 34 months identified with delayed speech, found that half of these children still had delayed speech at 3-years-old. Also, the research found that 61.9 per cent of this cohort also exhibited deficits in social skills (Paul et al. 1991: 864). Yew and O' Kearney (2013) argued that children with expressive language difficulties are more likely to withdraw from social communication exchanges due to the lack of language skill.

3.8.3 **Summary of the section**

This chapter has shown children with identified SLCN are recognised within the SENDCoP as having early "special educational needs and disabilities" (SEND) (DfE, 2015). The education system requires children to reach specific levels of development to effectively access the learning opportunities available to them. Therefore, the chapter highlighted the importance of early identification of SLCN as part of the process to provide support for a SLCN to improve the long-term outcomes of children through targeted interventions. Interventions are support strategies that help children to achieve at the same rate as their peers (Ofsted, 2017).

The use of labels to identify children as having an SEND was debated within the chapter and the conclusion was reached that the label is not always helpful due to the variability in the factors that contribute towards defining SLCN. Also, practitioners are responsible for identifying children with SLCN who may not be confident or fully trained to make informed decisions on the level of children's language development. The training available to support practitioners' knowledge of language development and language needs was identified and reviewed, concluding that training opportunities are minimal and do not appear to sufficiently prepare practitioners to recognise SLCN in children. These factors are significant to the current study that seeks to explore practitioners' experiences of the assessment and identification of SLCN in young children.

The chapter explored internal and external support for children with SLCN and highlighted that there are factors that contribute towards how support is prioritised and organised. Internally, the literature concluded that barriers to supporting children with identified SLCN included a lack of specific speech and language training, staff turnover and funding. These factors impacted the practitioners' ability to support children and provide targeted interventions. Barriers to accessing external support for children were the prioritisation, organisation and allocation of funding and resources through the cuts made

to services. These factors may influence the practitioners' experiences of supporting children with SLCN.

3.9 Discussion of the literature

The literature chapters highlighted the complexity of the early years sector, which combines ideas of child development based on maturation and psychological interpretations of what it means to be a child in England. In one regard, development relates to the chronological age of children (Keenan & Evans, 2009) and in another, development refers to the ongoing learning process during an individuals' life (Palaiologou, 2019) that presents problems with standardised evaluations and may cause uncertainty for practitioners when assessing children's development.

The existing education system appears to operate on a "norm-referenced approach" where children need to have specific skills at chronological ages to access the curriculum (Leland & Kasten, 2002). This argument is supported by studies showing that children start school without the requisite level of communication to fully access the curriculum (Andrews et al. 2017; Law et al. 2017). This point demonstrates the importance of the assessment, identification and support of SLCN to help children to achieve. The literature provided an overview of the different tools that could be used to assess children's speech, language and communication by practitioners although did not appear to provide a definitive process for assessment and identification of SLCN. Therefore, the first aim of the current research is to explore how practitioners identify SLCN needs in children.

Practitioners in England depend on policy guidelines via the EYFS (DfE, 2012b), which suggests that child growth is linear and progresses chronologically (Dubiel, 2014). EYFS criticism has shown that the guidance is ambiguous and subjective and can, therefore, impact the consistency and reliability of practitioners' assessments (Brooker et al. 2010; Holland & Doherty, 2016; Mengoni & Oates, 2013; Osgood, 2014). The drive for data could also impact on the reliability of the assessments (Roberts-Homes &

Bradbury, 2016). This factor is essential to the current study because assessments are used as part of the identification process of SLCN. Therefore, the second aim of the current research is to explore how practitioners assess children's development and more specifically, children's speech, language and communication development.

The value of qualified practitioners was discussed in the literature chapters and concluded that the existing qualification system is confusing and complicated in addition to the sector facing problems with recruitment and retention of staff, resulting in a decrease in practitioners obtaining higher qualifications (Elwick et al. 2018). Also reviewed was the training available to enhance practitioners' basic knowledge of language development and language needs, finding that training resources are not regularly accessible to practitioners, and do not appear to prepare practitioners to recognise SLCN in children adequately. These factors may influence how practitioners assess, identify, and support children in their care. The inconsistency further exacerbates this consideration in determining normative language development or SLCN that can make it difficult for practitioners to accurately assess, identify and support the development of children in the setting. Section 3.7 identified that a range of support options could be available to practitioners, however, did not provide a complete picture of the support options available for practitioners to support children. This leads to the third aim of the current research of exploring the practitioners' experiences of supporting children with identified SLCN.

The final section of the literature chapters highlighted inconsistencies in how support for children with SLCN is prioritised, organised and funded. Barriers to supporting children through targeted interventions were identified, and the chapter concluded that high staff turnover in the sector meant that there were obstacles in providing consistent support to children in early years settings. The reduction and distribution of government funding can make it challenging for practitioners to provide consistent support for children. These factors may influence the practitioners' experiences of supporting children with SLCN.

The final sections of Chapter 3 raised questions concerning the variations between local authorities in funding. This leads to the fourth and final question of the current research to compare the experiences of practitioners in different locations to identify similarities and differences in the identification, assessment and support of children with SLCN.

These chapters have justified why the current research is essential in exploring early years practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs, in early years settings.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Earlier chapters highlighted the role of the practitioner in the identification and support of children with speech, language and communication needs. The literature chapters reviewing policy and provision showed the potential tensions that practitioners face when supporting children with speech and language needs. The aim of this study was to investigate early years practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs, in early years settings. Therefore, I designed the study to capture practitioners' experience and their perception of their role. The following questions were developed to address this aim:

1. What are the experiences of early years practitioners in relation to the identification process of speech language and communication needs in two-year-old children?
2. What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are assessed?
3. What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are supported?
4. What are the differences and similarities in experiences between early years practitioners in two different counties?

The methodology chapter sets out the philosophical stance of the researcher and how these philosophical principles underpinned and shaped the study design. Through reflection I identified how my values and beliefs shape my understanding of how knowledge is constructed and co-constructed with others. The chapter describes the path I took in designing the study and the changes I made along the way as my knowledge and understanding of philosophical principles and methodological perspectives evolved. The pilot

study explains how my thinking was formed which helped to shape the final study design. The recruitment and data collection processes are explained and I discuss the problems faced relating to issues such as power, bias, validity and positionality. I conclude with the ethical considerations of the project and reflections on how narrative inquiry provided ways of understanding the practitioners' experiences as they understood them.

4.2 Philosophical perspectives

To understand the design of the research, the following section seeks to illustrate the philosophical principles that underpinned all the decisions made throughout the research process. By interacting with literature (see chapters 2 & 3) and initiating a cycle of deep reflection of my values and beliefs, ontological and epistemological perspectives developed and helped to frame and direct study.

4.2.1 Ontological beliefs

Ontology relates to the nature of being and provides a way of understanding 'what is' concerning existence (Crotty, 1998). Ontological perspectives are relativistic, assuming that knowledge is subjective and dependent on the perspective and actions of the knower or the realist who assume that knowledge is based on proven facts (Willig, 2013). Crotty (1998) argued that relativism and realism coexist; a social construction may begin with an idea or an ideal materialising in a rule or construct that is then treated as real. Crotty (1998: 64) asserted that the basis of individual understanding is experience and therefore argued that "what is said to be 'the way things are' is really just 'the sense we make of them.'" Individuals organise understanding depending upon their earlier experiences, and therefore, knowledge and understanding is subjective.

Building upon the idea that earlier experiences aid individual understanding, my ontological beliefs are grounded in the notion that knowledge is subjective; reality is like a prism where the focus shifts depending upon the individual. Denzin and Lincoln (2004: 37) termed this view as a constructivist paradigm that reflects a relativist ontology through the perspective that no single reality exists, rather a collection of “multiple realities.” Guba and Lincoln (1989: 80) defined a paradigm as a set of beliefs and assumptions that an individual makes that guides their activities and actions. Mertens (2005: 13) explained that the basis of the constructivist paradigm is the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and the role of the researcher is to “attempt to understand” the lived human experiences from the perspectives of those people who have experienced it first-hand. Therefore, an event is first experienced by the individual who understands the event and shares this understanding with others to construct new understanding.

My ontological view is that different people can experience the same event or similar events differently depending upon their earlier experiences, cultural and personal identities. King and Horrocks (2010) explained that a relativist ontological perspective assumes that understanding comes from interaction and engagement with other people, although I would extend this further to engagement and interaction with people and social structures. There may be similarities within the experiences that individuals share because of external factors such as national and local government policy drivers. However, the children, families and other practitioners that they encounter will change how they interpret and experience that reality, and therefore, my ontological belief is that knowledge is subjective and therefore aligned with a relativist ontological perspective.

4.2.2 **Epistemological beliefs**

The previous section identified my ontological perspective as relativist; the following section creates a discussion of knowledge and what it means to know from an individual perspective. Epistemological perspectives shape how a person understands knowledge and therefore underpin this thesis as the research aims to understand the experiences of practitioners.

Epistemology is based on perceptions of what is and what it means to know (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological beliefs create a framework through which to understand the world. According to Pascale (2011: 28), epistemology raises three factors; the individuals who know, the process of knowing and the process of how knowledge can be treated as 'truth'. The concept of truth also relates to a person's ontological beliefs. In a realist perspective, truth represents proven facts through a positivist approach to research. In this respect, truth relates to the approach taken by positivist researchers who adopt an observable or testable approach to the research (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). In a constructivist approach, truth is subjective and therefore, a "universally accepted" definition of truth cannot be known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 204).

The constructivist approach aligns with my own epistemological beliefs. One individuals' perception of truth may not match another individuals, and therefore multiple possibilities of 'truth' emerge (Letherby et al. 2012). Therefore, in response to Pascale's (2011) three factors, the first being the individual, the focus would be on how a person knows rather than what they know. The social process of how the person comes to know and understand their reality, in response to the factors within the person's life, is essential in understanding their 'truth'. The approach of using participants' stories is the exploration of their truth. The influence of truth in this respect is based more on how truthful the person expressing an experience is to themselves in the recounting of an event (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In this respect, knowledge is subjective; creating knowledge depends on multiple factors that interlink to create new knowledge. For example, engaging in a collaborative

exchange, the participant as the ‘teller’ of the story and researcher as the ‘sharer’ of the experience creates an opportunity for new shared meaning. By sharing an encounter, the teller allows the sharer to enter into the teller’s interpretation of the experience. Gadamer (2004, cited in Howell, 2013) discussed that understanding involves “projected meaning.” To understand the projected meaning, an individual must have prior experience or knowledge to comprehend the shared experience. This discussion could be extended further by Covey (2004: 195) who stated that “we do not see the world as it is; we see the world as we are.”

The interpretation of experiences is individual and context-bound. The experience begins with the individual, and the telling of an event or experience is an extension of who we are and how we have understood the event (Daiute, 2014). My epistemological principles are, therefore based on constructivist ideals and work because knowledge is subjective and dependent on factors that interact with the researcher and participant. Knowledge is a social construct that ultimately changes and transforms individual perception (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is essential to recognise that the participants’ perspectives are subjective and based on their version of the truth. Similarly, my perspective is subjective; therefore, the view of the researcher impacts on how the shared experiences are perceived and interpreted. My positionality within the research is discussed within sections 1.1 and 4.13.3 to explain how the researcher’s perceptions of the shared experiences are interpreted and understood.

4.3 Towards a philosophical stance

This research aims to understand the participants’ experiences of supporting children identified with SLCN. I identified my ontological and epistemological position in the previous two sections. This section explores the philosophical stance of the research and how this helped to shape the study design. Narrative inquiry is explored as a process of shared experiences by telling stories to clarify events between researcher and participant, leading to a discussion on hermeneutics as a method of understanding how participants

interpret their experiences. The section is concluded with an exploration of how narrative inquiry and hermeneutics can be applied together to develop greater understanding of the experiences of the participants in the current study.

4.3.1 **Narrative Inquiry**

The previous sections identified that my ontological beliefs are relativistic and epistemological beliefs are constructivist. The previous sections described knowledge as subjective, and therefore, there are multiple variations of knowledge constructed through individual experience and the sharing of those experiences with others. Therefore, these understandings have informed the design and focus for the research. Connelly and Clandinin (2006: 375) identified that philosophically, the experience becomes the "phenomenon under study". This discussion can be extended further by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) drawing on the work of Dewey who stated:

> in an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it (Dewey, 1937: 247).

The things and events that an individual encounter becomes an experience to the individual, earlier encounters with events and things determine how the individual perceives that experience. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007: 39) thus determined that to understand the experience, the individual must return to the experience and examine how they understood it and the meaning that it held. I asked participants within the current study to reflect and examine the meaning of their experiences and how it made them feel at the time of the event. Narrative inquiry is a methodological and philosophical approach that provides a way of viewing and gaining insight into an individuals' experiences. Narrative inquiry seeks to explore the experiences of a participant and the importance the participant places on this experience, often by telling stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The point of narrative

inquiry is to explore how the individual relates and understands different aspects of the world (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007: 42) expanded the discussion further and stated that the sharing of stories not only provides insight into the individual lived experience but also provides insight into their worlds stating:

> social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted – but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) highlighted that the elements of shared experiences are selected by the individual and what they perceive to be relevant within the accounts they share. The importance and significance of experiences can vary over time, influencing future events and are consequently bound within temporal contexts (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narrative inquiry, therefore, captures the experiences and understanding of the experiences at the moment that they are shared. Narrative inquiry considers the importance of shared experiences and accepts that the experience constitutes knowledge and understanding from the participants' frame of reference. The frame of reference for participants, therefore, shaped the research design, collection and analysis of data.

Clandinin (2006) pointed out that narrative forms of data collection and narrative inquiry are different. Narrative forms of data collection can be used in a variety of different ways, whereas narrative inquiry as a methodology emphasises the lived experiences of participants. Clandinin (2006) urged that these differences need to be highlighted and discussed to ensure clarity. Narrative forms of data collection can be used in a variety of different ways and to complement different methodologies. For example, phenomenological approaches, could use narrative forms of data collection (Creswell et al. 2007). Ethnographers might also utilise narrative data collection tools (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). Narrative inquiry is not a data collection tool; the methodological approach explores three dimensions: interaction, continuity

and situation (Clandinin, 2006). Interaction relates to the personal and social aspects of a person's life that impact how experience is perceived. Continuity relates to the past, present and the future elements of the person's experience and place identifies the contextual location of the experiences that are shared. Connolly and Clandinin (2006) noted that the narrative inquirer will take these three dimensions into the research field to help engage and negotiate with participants in the recounting of stories and experiences. The process of narrative inquiry, therefore, transcends a tool for data collection to become a theoretical perspective with which to enter and actively engage with the research as a process.

The narrative approach reflected my ontological perspective that knowledge is a subjective process and my epistemological perspective that knowledge is a social construct. Lu (2017) highlighted that narrative inquiry requires participants to reflect retrospectively on their experiences, to make meaning and connect the different aspects of their professional roles that impact on how the experience unfolds and how they understand that experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 76) stated that in narrative inquiry "the researcher enters a landscape and joins an ongoing professional life." In this respect, the researcher seeks to understand as the participant understands the event they are recalling (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The narrative approach links into another theoretical perspective of hermeneutics that seeks to understand as the individual understands as discussed in the following section.

4.3.2 **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is concerned with how something is understood both by a participant and by a researcher (Bryman, 2012). Hermeneutics is based on life experience and is not "an isolated human activity" (Howell, 2013: 158). Therefore, all experiences concerning the event are essential in shaping a individuals' understanding of it. The analysis of historical events through lived experience and relationships with the three dimensions of Clandinin's (2006) definition, discussed in the previous section, achieves understanding.

Reflection and retrospection are needed to aid understanding (Dewey, 1937). Gadamer (2008: 18) termed the reflective process “emancipatory”; through reflection, individuals can recount and explore an event to understand what it might mean. The reflective process referred to by Gadamer (2008) of understanding can be liberating for the reflector who may be able to find new meaning to explain the experience. The act of reflection is grounded in the interpretation of the experience by the individual; interpretation, therefore, cements the reflection (Ricoeur, 2016). Clandinin (2007) asserted that understanding comes from exploring the historical context.

The purpose of hermeneutics is to seek to understand how others understand an event (Smith & Osborn, 2008). To understand and be able to interpret an event or experience, a person must already have some experience of the subject. Stombart (1863-1941, as cited in Howell, 2013:11) theorised that shared knowledge creates a “connection point for understanding.” Connecting with an individual by sharing experiences offers further opportunities to expand and deepen the meaning of the shared experience.

This section identified hermeneutics as a philosophical approach to understanding experience. The following section connects hermeneutics with narrative inquiry to demonstrate how the two philosophical approaches relate to one another.

4.3.3 **Narrative hermeneutics**

Different sources that discuss hermeneutics focus on interpreting texts (Ritzer, 2005; Howell, 2013). However, Brockmeier and Meretoja (2014) suggested that the basis of hermeneutics is on interpreting experiences with the aim of understanding, language is, therefore, an essential component. The representation of language occurs through different mediums, including both text and verbal language. Brockmeier and Meretoja (2014: 2) expressed the view that the common denominator within both narrative and hermeneutical approaches is “meaning-making.” Therefore, the two

theoretical approaches can complement each other. Wiklund-Gustin (2010: 33) extended the explanation further by drawing on Ricoeur's work and stated that although a story is told by and belongs to an individual, the researcher and story-teller become "co-authors of its meaning." In this respect, narrative inquiry is the philosophical stance that aids capturing the story, hermeneutics is the mechanism through which to understand the story and explore more in-depth meaning. Therefore, the chosen theoretical perspective through which to explore the current study is narrative hermeneutics. The reflective process that led to forming the philosophical principles can be seen in Figure 4 that identifies each stage of the process. In this respect it is possible to identify each philosophical stage that helped to form and underpin the study.

Figure 4: The philosophical principles links that shape the study design

An alternative philosophical approach that I might have taken was phenomenology. Van Manen (2016: 9) defined phenomenology as "the study of lived experience." Van Manen (2016) extended this definition by explaining

that the point of phenomenological research is to gain insights into the world through the experiences of those people who inhabit it. Harman (2011) developed the definition by providing further clarity; the primary focus in phenomenological research is the specific event or situation and how the participant perceives the event (Harman, 2011). The focus of participant reflection to go back and reconsider events is an essential part of the phenomenological approach (Cohen et al. 2018). This approach partially reflects the aim of the current research; however, phenomenological researchers attempt to "put aside any prior concepts or suppositions" (Cohen et al. 2018: 300).

Phenomenological researchers aim to explore the experiences as the participants perceive them. The role of the researcher in a phenomenological approach is to try to reduce researcher bias (Howell, 2013). Although I agreed with the principle of this approach, identifying and understanding the researchers' preconceptions, subjectivity and biases helped to connect with the participants' lived experience (Riessman,1993; Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Ultimately, although there were aspects of the phenomenological approach that aligned with the current study, a narrative inquiry approach was chosen as the guiding philosophical stance because it acknowledged the relationship between the researcher and participant in "co-authoring" the meaning of the shared experiences (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010).

The following section describes the process of the pilot study and the subsequent changes that helped to shape the final study design including the original research objectives and research question.

4.4 Pilot Study

This section includes a summary of the research pilot to show the process of reflection that changed the direction of the research, to explain the choices made to shape the current study design. The research initially began at the University of Sheffield, and I conducted a pilot study after gaining ethical approval (see Appendix B). Pilot studies are an essential stage in the

research process (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001:1) have shown that a pilot study has two different functions, one to perform a “feasibility study,” and the other to test the instrument used to collect data. Schreiber (2012) pointed to the utility of pilot studies to assess whether studies are specific enough to address the research question.

The initial aim of the research was to investigate how early years provision supported families and practitioners of two-year-old children with speech and language delays. The original intention was to follow a cohort of two-year-old children longitudinally, throughout their early years provision to the term before the child began formal education, to observe the perceptions of those parents and practitioners who supported the individual child throughout the process. Therefore, the pilot involved five semi-structured interviews comprising of two managers from early years settings and three parents of children with identified SLCN within one geographical location.

The following section reflects on the process of the pilot study and explored how the process helped to cement my understanding of how the philosophical principles were fundamental in shaping the study design.

4.4.1 **Reflections and changes made as a result of the pilot study**

The pilot study highlighted the organic nature of qualitative research and the importance of flexibility as my skills and knowledge developed as a researcher. Holliday (2007) asserted that researchers need to keep in mind that research is an organic process that evolves and develops over time. In this sense, the research process follows a similar pattern to the constructivist paradigm discussed in section 4.3.1, where knowledge is constructed through interaction (Gadamer, 2004, cited in Howell, 2013).

During the interviews, it became apparent that the participants provided answers in the form of stories that seemed to help them make sense of the experience that they were sharing (Cohen et al. 2018). The pre-set questions became arduous and limited the responses of the participants. Therefore, I

reflexively responded to the participants and how they wanted to share their experiences by allowing them to talk through their experiences without direction or interruption. Galletta (2013) addressed the research moments when the researcher is standing at an intersection and looks at their position in research and how that position affects participants. Reflexive practice in the moment shaped the direction of the research through deciding whether to continue with the initial study design, in this case, semi-structured interviews or to change direction. I decided to change direction to respond to the way the participants appeared to prefer to share their experiences (Galletta, 2013). The divergent move from a semi-structured interview to passing over the control to the participants to shape how their stories unfolded was an example of reflexivity when faced with a research junction. The participants shared their experiences more freely and invited me to join in a conversation with them over various topics, and this created further discussion and the sharing of experiences as the participants reflected on the stories that they shared. The sharing of experience through telling stories is indicative of narrative inquiry discussed in section 4.3.1 (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010).

The pilot study highlighted that I had not fully considered aspects of the research, including the feasibility of the study or the appropriateness of the chosen research tool, as discussed by Schreiber (2012). I conducted the pilot too early and my understanding was, therefore, not fully formed. I had not fully developed my understanding of my epistemological or ontological beliefs or envisaged how this might impact on decisions relating to methodological perspectives. At this point in the research process, this oversight distorted my approach to the interviews, and I did not gain the insight that I needed. However, the pilot was an enriching experience that helped me to reconsider the research question, aims and my own philosophical beliefs. The pilot provided an opportunity to reflect on the aims of the research. I realised that the focus of the research was too diverse. Practitioners' experiences of supporting children came from a different context to the experiences of parents supporting their child, and therefore, I realised that I needed to focus on one participant group in order to answer

the research question with depth and meaning.

Within all the interviews, the participants discussed their experiences and naturally told stories to explain why and how they perceived events the way that they did. Using specific stories was not something that I had previously considered. The use stories within the interview helped me to focus the research design and develop conversational interviews as a research tool discussed in section 4.8. The focus of stories to share experiences also enabled me to go through an extensive period of reflection to explore my own ontological and epistemological beliefs concerning my emerging philosophical stance discussed in section 4.2.

I decided to narrow down the research to focus on early years practitioners' experiences. The discussions surrounding children's speech and language was not limited to language delay, and both participant groups discussed a range of different speech and language needs. Therefore, the focus changed from language delay to speech, language and communication needs. As a result of the pilot study, I reconsidered the research aims, and I adjusted the question at this point to reflect the change in focus.

4.5 Research methods

The previous section detailed my philosophical stance and how the process positioned the research. The pilot study was a pivotal part of the research process and instrumental in deciding the direction that the research should take. The following section starts by defining the research methodology and explains the changes made to the design of the analysis. I identified the modified research question, aims and objectives, before exploring the research methods and data collection processes.

4.6 Qualitative paradigm

Reflecting on the pilot study and redefining the aims of the research, the research aimed to explore experiences of supporting children and therefore remained a qualitative study. The qualitative approach also aligned with my philosophical perspectives and the narrative hermeneutic approach that seeks to understand as the participant understands (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014). Qualitative studies typically use words rather than statistical forms of data in the analysis (Bryman, 2012: 380). A qualitative research study may involve "inductivist, constructionist and interpretivist" approaches to data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012: 380). However, Hammersley (2013) asserted that definitions of qualitative research either list what it is or is not when compared to quantitative research. Hammersley (2013) argued that because of the various ways qualitative research is organised definitions of qualitative research are not helpful; instead, considering qualitative research as a frame that provided a way of looking at the real world of participants (Hammersley, 2013). In this sense, due to taking a narrative hermeneutic philosophical approach that seeks to explore the stories and experiences, a qualitive paradigm was needed. Hammersley (2013: 12) provided the following definition of qualitative research:

> ..a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis.

By breaking each element of qualitative research mentioned above into components, Hammersley (2013) expanded the definition and suggested that while qualitative research will not include all components, most of them would be evident in the analysis. Cohen et al. (2018) determined that the purpose of the research study and the researchers ontological and epistemological views influence the paradigm or how the researcher looks at the research. As discussed in the previous sections, my ontological and epistemological perspectives reflected the view of a relativist and constructivist approach to

research. The research question aim and questions all focus on the human experience. Van Manen (2016: 33) presented the view that qualitative research poses the question “What is it?” and I would add another question: “what is it like for you?” This question relates to the narrative hermeneutic approach that seeks to understand the experience of a participant as they understand the experience (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014). A qualitative paradigm provided a framework from which to view the research and held the research aim firmly at the forefront of the research process and provided a starting position for the research aim and research question detailed in the following section.

4.7 Research aims and questions

This research aims to investigate early years practitioners’ experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs, in early years settings. To address this aim the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the experiences of early years practitioners in relation to the identification process of speech language and communication needs in two-year-old children?
2. What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are assessed?
3. What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are supported?
4. What are the differences and similarities in experiences between early years practitioners in two different counties?

4.8 Conversational interviews

Since the philosophical approach taken was narrative hermeneutics, I needed a form of data collection to help participants express their experiences. Interviews are a standard data collection method for qualitative researchers that provides a choice of how to approach the interview, including structured, semi-structured or unstructured approaches (Brinkman, 2014). Roulston (2012) identified that interviews follow a typical pattern of question and answer flowing from the researcher to the participant. Structured interviews involve a set of pre-conceived questions that do not allow room for deviation, and are therefore limited by the researcher and what they perceive to be of importance (Brinkman, 2014). The researcher has previously conceived ideas on the direction the interview is expected to take and will orchestrate the flow through carefully considered pre-set questions to guide the participant through the process (Roulston, 2012).

An alternative form of interview is the conversational interview (Patton, 2002). The purpose of the conversational interview is to create a dialogue with the participant, whereby the researcher asks questions based on the responses and experiences shared by the participant (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). It is semi-structured in the sense that there are often overarching themes to the conversation and unstructured in that the conversation can create new questions and flow in any direction, therefore, enabling an in-depth discussion on the points that are introduced by either the participant or the researcher (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Roulston, (2012) explained that the conversational interview does not ascribe to the traditional sequence of an interview of question-response, conversely the conversational approach models a typical conversation with opportunities for extended discussion. Roulston (2012: 128) identified that everyday conversation can appear to be “chaotic and unfocussed” with a shared reciprocal approach to asking and answering questions. Roulston (2012) continued that the benefits to conversational interviews are the authentic data generated from conversation due to the more natural approach. Others have provided limitations of the approach by suggesting

that as a conversation, there is little structure and therefore every conversation will be different and could, therefore, compromise the reliability of the study (Roulston, 2012).

The pilot study (see 4.4) highlighted that the semi-structured interview approach did not suit the purposes of this study. The participants were eager to share their experiences, in sometimes “chaotic” ways and therefore, the typical interview format did not fulfil the requirements of the current study. The current research aimed at exploring participants' experiences from their point of reference; therefore, I decided to take a conversational approach to the interviews.

The conversations were planned at convenient times for the participant and involved a period of general discussion over a drink before moving the discussion towards the general research focus. The structure of the interviews, as highlighted by Roulston (2012), differed on each occasion. Some participants began with specific memories of places that they had worked, or the journey into working in the early years sector. The conversational interview helped the participant to share the decision about where the conversation went and how much or little, they felt comfortable with sharing. The informal approach to the interview was part of a collaborative exercise where the researcher and participant ‘co-authored’ the meaning through interactive dialogue; a semi-structured interview may not have allowed this flexibility (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010).

The process of “co-authoring” is both beneficial and problematic. The term ‘co-author’ in the context of this study is the process of creating understanding through the dialogical process of the conversational interview (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010). Co-authoring or co-creating, therefore, return to the philosophical debate of what it means to know and how it means to know (Crotty, 1998). Co-authoring meaning, therefore, indicates that there is no single way of knowing and therefore, at this moment, during this conversation, this is how I share what I know and understand, and through a

dialogical exchange, both members of the conversation can know and understand.

Polen-Petit (2018) pointed out that social interaction aids the process of constructing meaning, and therefore, the dialogue is an essential component to understanding. The process is beneficial as co-authorship indicates shared ownership of the discussion, the participant explains their understanding of an experience, and this is then taken by the researcher to understand within the "foci of the research" (Polen-Petit, 2018: 7). The process can become problematic in several ways. The question arises as to who owns the shared stories or experiences and how the conversation shaped through the analysis process that may involve reorganising or thematically analysing experiences (Smythe & Murray, 2005b). In both of these instances, participant approval of the interview transcripts maintained co-authorship (see Appendix C for an excerpt of an interview). Participants were invited to discuss data analysis at various stages for an opportunity to express their views. The process provided both researcher and participant with negotiated responsibility throughout the research process.

4.9 Reflective research journals

The process that a researcher takes can be documented in a reflective research journal to provide an additional source of rich data relating to the research and adds an alternative way of knowing the research (Janesick, 2014). The research journal is also a helpful tool to show the journey of the researcher throughout the research process, to explain the thoughts of the researcher at different stages to explain the choices made and why (Janesick, 2014).

Janesick (2016: 34) posited the view that a researcher is a "research instrument." Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that researchers are the orchestrators of the research study, the researcher decides what to study, what methods to apply and the lens through which to view and analyse the

data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that the researcher guides the interaction of the different components within a research study, and therefore, the researcher becomes a research instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 39) stated:

> …because of the understanding that all instruments interact with respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction.

Concerning this thesis, I took field notes in the form of a reflective research journal to capture my reflective thoughts throughout the data collection process. The reflective journals written before and after interviews took place captured my initial thoughts and future observations (see Appendix D for an example) besides documenting the decisions made at different stages throughout the research process. Within the reflective journal, I described the interview process, including the interview location and the transcription processes.

4.10 Data collection procedure

The participants received a research information letter and a copy of the consent form before the interview, to provide an opportunity to ask questions about the research or the interview process (see Appendices E & F). allocated time at the start of each interview to chat with the participant. Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) discussed this stage of the interview, where the researcher attempts to build a connection with the participants, so that mutual trust is established, is essential in helping the participant to feel more at ease when sharing their story, while also providing the opportunity to ask questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 128) termed this time as “setting the interview stage”. I set the interview stage within the current study and used the time to go through the information letter and consent form to ensure that the participant was happy to continue. The conversational interview began and was audio recorded in agreement with the participant both verbally and in writing.

Conversational interviews are an informal approach to data collection that requires careful planning. Cohen et al. (2018) recommended factoring in time before interviews take place to prepare for the interview process. Gillham (2005) argued that planning is a critical component in the interview process; however, he also highlighted that there may be constraints that affect the choices that a researcher makes. Pre-planning can alleviate some of these constraints, although as Gillham (2005) addressed, it is not always possible to find an ideal set of circumstances to conduct an interview.

Consideration of place, time, potential power relations, setting the tone of the interview and personal reflective preparation formed the pre-planning process of the current study. I gave the place of the interviews careful thought, for several reasons as location can add context and therefore influence the interview (Cohen et al. 2018). The place of the interview can impact on the power balance between the researcher and participant (Bowlby & Day, 2018). Interviews that take place within a professional environment can reflect power to either the researcher or participant depending on those professional environments the interview takes place within (Costley et al. 2010). The professional environment can signify a power dynamic, for example, a manager and an employee or a teacher and a student. The importance of the interview location is discussed by Pink (2008), who argued that place could impact on the quality of the data collected. Pink (2008) conversely argued that where possible, data should be gathered in places as close to the area of study as is possible, as this can help to prompt memories and feelings of an experience (Pink, 2008).

In line with the egalitarian approach to the interview process, the participants chose the location of the interview. The choice of location for the interview could have been the participants home, place of work, place of study or a neutral location. My home was the last option for one participant when other locations were ruled out as not suitable by the participant. Gillham (2005: 4) argued that while some locations may not be ideal, hearing what a person has to say may mean compromising on the place that the participant chooses to say it. I recognise the choice of my home as an interview place as fraught

with potential power issues, as discussed in section 4.14.6, however, as Gillham (2005) suggested, I felt it was essential to hear the participants experiences and therefore compromised on the interview location.

4.11 Participant sample, recruitment and selection

Jones et al. (2013) argued that participant sampling is one of the critical factors within a study design. The quality of the data collected depends on the participants selected to take part in the study and therefore is a crucial factor of the research study design (Jones et al. 2013). Wells (2011: 130) identified that a clearly articulated sampling plan would aid in attracting suitable participants to answer the research question and is defined by the context of the study.

When deciding the criteria for participant selection, the current study took into account the context (Wells, 2011). The set criteria were early years practitioners, who were currently working or had previously worked, with two-year-old children, with identified SLCN and working within two main geographical areas in North East England. The choice of the geographical area was determined because of researcher locality to ensure the researcher could realistically achieve contact and visits. The choice of two geographical areas enabled the fourth question of the research to be addressed, which was to analyse the differences and similarities in experiences between practitioners in two different counties. Edwards and Holland (2013) stated that academic researchers often choose a convenience sample for participant recruitment because of the availability of potential participants within a location. However, Patton (2002) considered this approach limiting, as he stated that it could be a lazy way of collecting data that might omit other more reliable sampling methods. Nonetheless, in conjunction with other sampling methods, Patton (2002) continued that these limitations may be reduced. To support Patton's (2002) concerns, I took a random purposive approach within the convenience sample.

The purposeful random sample was accomplished by appealing to participants in specific locations that attracted participants with the above requirements (Appendix G, figure c). The specific places achieved the purposive aspect of sampling (Patton, 2002). Although this approach reduced some randomness's of the sampling process, the sample pool was large enough to allow for random selection. The participants made contact if they were interested in taking part in the study, therefore achieving the random aspect of sampling. Patton (2002) took the view that random purposive sampling can add to the trustworthiness of the data collection process as the researcher has little control over who volunteers for the study.

A university foundation degree course specialising in early childhood education was one of the specific places in which I made the call for participants. Foundation degrees are practice-based courses with the requirement that students either work or volunteer in a setting, therefore, were considered likely to have the required experiences to answer the research question (Mason, 2017). I placed a notification calling for participants on the Universities Virtual Learning Environment for the course, with instructions for students to get in touch via email if they were interested in gaining more information.

I placed advertisements calling for participants through other specific places (see Appendix G, figure c). Recruitment of this type defined by Gelinas et al. (2017: 4) as "passive on-line recruitment" and mirrors the traditional approach of physically posting informational advertising flyers to recruit potential participants. The on-line approach increased the opportunity for random sampling within the convenience of the geographical area (Gelinas et al. 2017). Gelinas et al. (2017) highlighted the advantages of the use of social media for participant recruitment as being able to reach a broader range of participants. Qualitative narrative studies typically use smaller groups of participants. The next section addressed these specifics.

4.11.1 **Sample size**

The size of the sample for any research study varies and depends on several factors (Marshall et al. 2013). Typically, quantitative research yields larger sample sizes because of the data collection methods available (Marshall et al. 2013). Conversely, qualitative research focuses on smaller sample sizes; however, the question of how many participants there should be within a study is open to debate, with no definitive guide to how many is enough or how many is too many (Marshall et al. 2013). The sample size reflects the research question and the researchers' ontological and epistemological beliefs when constructing the study design. Within qualitative studies, Trotter (2012) also discussed that redundancy and saturation are useful indicators in determining sample size. Trotter (2012: 399) explained that redundancy is interviewing until a point where no new themes emerge from sequential participants. Saturation is the process in which the questions change in each sequential interview to allow for new concepts introduced in each interview. When questioning has been "thoroughly explored" and no new concepts or themes emerge from any further interviews, the process reaches saturation (Trotter, 2012: 399). Marshall et al. (2013) also argued that saturation is a useful indicator in determining the sample size for a research study. Within narrative inquiry, every story is unique; however, there are commonalities about a specific research topic and the themes they gravitate around (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both saturation and redundancy apply to narrative sample sizes, when the main points expressed within participants stories, are repeated in sequential stories expressed by participants, and therefore, no further interviews are needed. Early education and care research studies and the sample sizes used are another useful guide for verifying the sample size. The examples in Table 5 identify the number of participants used in other qualitative early childhood research studies.

Table 5: Examples of studies in early childhood education and care CEC and number of participants

Author	Study	Sample size
West-Olatunji, et al. (2008)	Explored collaborated learning and cultural competence in early childhood educators,	4
Heald (2007)	Explored the experiences of Chinese early childhood student teachers in trying to gain employment in New Zealand	7
Chalke, (2015)	Explored early years practitioners' stories of professional identity	5
Garrow-Oliver (2017)	Explore child care directors understanding of leadership	5
Escamilla and Meier (2018)	Early childhood teachers as change agents	10

For the current study, 15 participants formed the total sample, with the participant numbers based upon the number of eligible participants who replied to the call for participants. No additional advertising was required since no new themes emerged from each interview, and the sample, therefore, reached redundancy and saturation, as stated by Trotter (2012). The number of participant also reflected the amount stated in the studies detailed in Table 7. The following section provided a general overview of the participants that were involved in the study.

4.11.2 **Overview of participants**

The dominant gender within the early years workforce is female (DfE, 2013a; Bonetti, 2019). Historically, the early years workforce is typically female; reasons for this include a combination of the caring nature of the role society perceives as suited to females (see 1.1.1) (Wingrave, 2014). In the current study, all participants were female therefore indicative of the early years workforce (Bonetti, 2019), Of the fifteen participants, eight came from

location one and seven from location two, although it was not intentional to create a relatively even split (see Appendix G: figures c & d).

The participants held a variety of different positions within the early years workforce. Two of the participants were SENDCos however, only one of these practitioners had received any specific training for the role. Three of the participants were managers of early years settings, and the remaining ten participants were all early years practitioners. At the time of the interview, the duration of the participants' employment in this sector was from three to thirty-seven years. The settings that the participants worked in varied from PVI settings, a maintained nursery setting and child-minder settings. The range of experiences from a range of different early years settings provided the research with a rich range of experiences.

4.12 Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1984: 10) identified the three main components of data analysis from their perspective: "data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification." Data reduction is the process of selection, focus, simplification and abstraction (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Cohen et al. (2018) suggested that qualitative data analysis is concerned with classifying, organising, explaining, and understanding the data. Miles and Huberman (1984) determined that data reduction is a necessary aspect of all qualitative research, as the researcher attempts to make sense of the data. Miles and Huberman (1984) argued that qualitative data in the form of textual information is "cumbersome." Data is displayed to enable the researcher and readers of the research to understand what is happening within the data without reading a full interview transcript. The final component of analysis from Miles and Huberman's (1984) perspective is the conclusion drawing and verification of the data. Conclusion drawing is where the researcher analyses what the data might mean.

My philosophical and methodological position informed data analysis (Esin, 2011). The current study involved a narrative hermeneutic stance to the

research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Esin (2011) determined that there are multiple ways of analysing narrative research, and that depends on the epistemological approach of the researcher that helped to shape the research design. Options for analysis included the structural model, thematic model, or interactional model. The structural model based on Labov's (1972, cited in Esin, 2011: 98) work focused on the "structure of stories and the way in which stories are told." Cortazzi (2014) identified hierarchies within the narrative structure. Superstructures are the framework that contains the organising principles specific to the chosen methodology that help to situate the narrative. From the superstructure, macro-structures are identified as segments within a text. The macro-structures are the six elements used to identify the overall structure in the narrative framework of Labov and Waletzsky (1967). These elements are abstract: orientation, complicating action, result, evaluation and coda. Similarly, Somers (1994) four dimensions of narrativity, contain four dimensions that help to structure the participants stories. The orientation stage are the stories the participants use to make sense of their lives; the public narratives; the concepts and explanations that are constructed by a participant to explain the event or the changing of events over time attached to events and the meta-narrativities relating to the social structures that social actors operate within. Each element defined segments of the story and position them within the overall structure of the story (Esin, 2011). The micro-structures are the individual and linear sequences within the narrative (Cortazzi, 2014). Georgakopoulou (2007: 64) argued that structural forms of narrative analysis do not allow for the "moment-to-moment nuances" that can occur within a narrative as the storyteller deviates from the story to add contextual or situated commentary before returning once more to the story or experience. Therefore, Georgakopoulou (2007: 64) argued that forms of structural narrative analysis create limitations within the analysis through the exclusion of the "moment-to-moment nuances" that help the storyteller and researcher to understand the story. To minimise this limitation, other forms of analysis were explored.

The thematic model used by Reissman (2008) is concerned with "the content of the stories and the themes around which stories are told" (Esin, 2011: 98).

The focus of thematic narrative analysis is the content of the narrative. The researcher analyses the narrative transcriptions through the identification of themes by breaking the text into smaller pieces (Reissman, 2008). Thematic analysis can draw from broader theoretical models that utilise the thematic approach, such as grounded theory where the theory emerges from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) or a combination of the two such as the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). Bailey and Jackson (2003) began with a grounded theory thematic approach to their research analysis and found that the specific storied elements of the data collected were lost. Structural and thematic approaches to narrative analysis contain both strengths and weaknesses.

Esin's third model (2011) is the interactional/performative model which focused on the contextual elements that shape the way narratives are constructed and the meaning generated through the collaboration between the participant and the researcher. The focus of the interactional and performative model is structural and thematic (Esin, 2011). The interaction between the researcher and the participant is essentially a performance, and thus the analysis focuses on all aspects of the capture of the story. Therefore, the audience, how the story is told, place, social circumstances and body language form part of the analysis. Nolas (2011) suggested that the application of pluralistic approaches to analysis can aid the researcher in extending knowledge and deepening understanding of the research topic. Several studies have utilized a synthesised approach to analysis, showing that there is a precedent for combining analytical-qualitative methods. Studies by Bailey and Jackson (2003) and Floersch et al. (2010) combined narrative analytical approaches with a grounded theory thematic approach. The following sections details how the present study devised both a structural narrative analytical framework synthesised with a constructivist grounded theory approach to analysing the data.

4.12.1 **Constructivist grounded theory**

The constructivist grounded theory approach assumes that both the researcher and participant cannot separate themselves from what they know (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist grounded theory approach differs from grounded theory in that the researcher is objective within the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2011). The role of the researchers and participants in a traditionally grounded theory approach is not recognised as necessary. Conversely, Charmaz (2011: 168) argued that the constructivist grounded theory approach "emphasizes multiple realities, the researcher and participants' respective positions and subjectivities, situated knowledge, and sees data as inherently partial." This approach resonates with my epistemological and ontological perspectives and also aligns with the narrative hermeneutic stance that acknowledges, the researcher cannot unknow what they know and therefore, prior knowledge guides the questions or flow of conversation. In the same respect, the participant bases their responses on previous experiences of the event to help them to understand (Lal et al. 2012). Riessman (2005) argued that the constructivist grounded theory approach sits appropriately within the narrative analysis spectrum as the approaches complement one another by ensuring the analysis of all collected data (Riessman, 2005). A critique of purely storied analysis techniques omit data that does not fit within a specific storied narrative, with a beginning a middle and an end, while the storied narrative analysis ensures that the participants' individual stories are heard (Riessman, 2005). However, Lal et al. (2012: 13) raised the concern that through thematic coding, the participant's story likely becomes 'fragmented' or reduced (Lal et al. 2012:13). Besides using the participant's own words verbatim to help maintain "a sense of participants' perspectives in a more holistic way" (King & Brooks, 2017: 30), the narrative analytical framework discussed in the previous section was used to minimise this limitation. Lal et al. (2012) suggested that narrative inquiry helps to build a conceptual bridge, to help create links between narrative and constructivist applications of grounded theory, providing an analytical approach that will help to draw out the richness of the storied accounts while also capturing the nuances within the

shared experiences.

The themes were deductively and inductively identified. The deductive analysis process identified themes by reading each transcript, taking into account the knowledge and understanding gained from reviewing the literature and my experiences in the early years, the themes were searched for and defined (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). Charmaz (2006) discussed going through the transcripts line by line and coding the data into themes as a process of discovery (Appendix L). Lines within the transcripts can "address several points it could be used to illustrate different categories" (Charmaz, 2006: 51). Therefore, different themes can contain the same line within the text and coded differently. This process was completed using Nvivo, a thematic board (see Appendix T) and a spreadsheet to explore the data in different ways. A list of themes was created and then organised into a thematic grid (see Appendix K for example of thematic grid). The next stage involved merging similar themes and creating sub-themes from related points (see Appendix M).

Themes were also identified inductively from the interviews by listening to each interview and noting significant points the participants made. Again, the literature, my knowledge of the sector and getting to know the participant through the transcription process and deductive stage of the analysis aided this process (Forman & Damschroder, 2007). I decided significance based on the discussion that surrounded the theme (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). When the participants were animated in the answers provided or extended the discussion, the main point was noted and thematically sorted and with a grid created for each participant (Krippendorff, 2004). After the first several interviews, the same themes emerged more or less, depending on how the individual felt about the theme. I combined the deductive and inductive themes to create a master grid of the main themes.

The combined approaches of structured narrative analysis and constructivist grounded theory provided a synthesised approach to viewing the individual stories of the participants. It bought to life the children that the participants

discussed and the places they worked and helped to bring an understanding of how the participants understood. In section 4.3.1, the co-authorship process was followed up with random participants invited to explore how their data are interpreted to provide additional knowledge and understanding. Participants discussed whether they agreed with the created themes and also provided the opportunity to see how the stories were extracted, re-ordered and then framed within the narrative framework. The different stages of analysis provided the opportunity to explore the research from alternative vantage points and therefore aided in "making the familiar strange" (Mannay 2016 :31). For a full breakdown of the analytical process see Appendix N. Throughout the research design process, some areas required a pause and reflection to appreciate how the areas might impact upon the study and therefore required attention. The following section discusses these issues and explains the steps taken to minimise potential limitations.

4.12.2 **Structural narrative analytical framework**

As discussed in the previous section, narrative methods of analysis capture the storied elements of the experience, while thematic analysis captures the "moment-to-moment" nuances of an experience (Georgakopoulou 2007: 64). The current study aimed to capture both the storied and nuanced aspects. Together, the aspects help the participant make sense of the experience and therefore, the researcher, to understand how the participant understands their stories (Howell, 2013).

Labov and Waletzky's (1967, cited in Esin, 2011), 'The Five Elements of Narrative' and Somers (1994) 'Four Dimensions of Narrativity' were explored as options for structuring the participants' stories. Riessman (2005), stated that not all stories would contain all the elements of a framework, and I found that some stories collated in this study contained some of the elements from Somer's framework and other elements of Labov and Waletzky's framework. Consequently, a hybrid analytical framework was developed using elements from both frameworks that fit the current study (see Table 6).

Table 6: Narrative Framework based on Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Somer's (1994) framework

Stage	Characteristics
Abstract	Introduction to the specific story.
Event Sequence	The events of the story.
Public Orientation	The places, characters, settings attached to the story.
Specific contextual	The explanations provided by the participant to explain how events evolve and develop over time.
Meta-narratives	The evaluation stage where the participant reflects back on the event to discuss what the event might mean either personally or professionally.

I extracted the storied elements from each interview to create one unstructured account and then coded sections using the hybrid framework above (see Appendix H for example). The accounts were then re-storied (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) into a logical order and then arranged into the hybrid framework above (see Appendix I for an example). I took the analysis a stage further to plot the participants journey throughout their careers and ordered these into a storyboard to provide further insight (see Appendix J). A limitation of purely storied analytical techniques is the absence of data that does not fit within a particular storied narrative, with a beginning a middle and an end (Riessman, 2005). A constructivist grounded theory approach was also adopted and discussed within the following section to minimise this limitation.

4.12.3 **Analytical and conceptual framework**

The data was analysed using the constructivist grounded theory and structural narrative analytical framework, as discussed in the previous sections. Through analysing the data in these ways, a range of themes was deduced and discussed within the findings section of this report (see Chapter 5). These findings were then explored through a further conceptual, analytical framework to aid a philosophical perspective to "make the familiar

strange” (Mannay, 2016: 31) that helped to gain a deeper understanding of the findings.

The ideas of Foucault were examined as a conceptual and analytical perspective because Foucault’s ideas can be “contrasted with other modes” of analysis, including “structural analysis…[and]….hermeneutic interpretation” (Koopman & Mataza, 2013: 825). This complementing contrast meant that I was able to synthesis Foucault’s ideas following the first stages of data analysis, to aid further analysis. Koopman and Mataz (2013) point out that individual use of Foucault’s original work is interpretivist. Individual researchers read, interpret and apply Foucault’s ideas in ways that Foucault may not have done himself for many reasons including that he lived in a world that is very different from current society (Koopman & Mataza, 2013: 829). Therefore, an analytical framework was devised using Koopman & Mataza’s (2013) Taxonomy for Foucauldian Inquires through exploring categories and concepts from Foucault’s work and applying them to the current study. For this reason, a category can be defined as: "constructions or schemata" enabling a lens to analyse data (Koopman & Mataza, 2013: 823). According to Koopman and Matza (2013), a category focusses attention on an aspect of the study. A concept emerges from the categories in the process of analysis. According to Koopman and Mataxa (2013), concepts concerning Foucault’s work could be determined as power, knowledge and discourse.

Therefore, in the final stage of analysis, Foucault’s work was explored following the first two stages of data analysis that led to the findings discussed in Chapter 5. From the findings, categories were identified in Foucault’s work, and the concepts were analysed (see Chapter 6).

4.13 Problematising the validity of narrative studies

Through the chosen methodological lens of narrative inquiry, the most common form of data collection is an interview (Riessman, 2008). Interviews provide qualitative data and are typically used to explore human experiences due to the ability to go beyond statistical data, to reach a deeper level of meaning based on the participants own words (Rubin & Babbie, 2009).

A criticism of qualitative approaches is that it can be difficult to achieve reliability (Rubin & Babbie, 2009). However, this can be confusing because of the ambiguity of the word 'reliability' in research. Reliability is a question of repeatability in a quantitative sense. It would be possible to demonstrate reliability if the same experiment were performed concurrently with the same individuals, yielding a similar result (Trochim et al. 2015). In qualitative studies, however, reliability is concerned with how data are analysed and not how data are collected (Lyn, 2016). In qualitative data collection, the aim is to achieve "verisimilitude" which as Webster and Mertova (2007: 4) explained, is the "appearance of truth or reality." The current study aimed to capture the participants 'truth' at the moment that they talk about their experience. Therefore, rather than validity, I sought verisimilitude. Webster and Mertova (2007: 99) discussed that there are two aspects of verisimilitude; the storied experiences should "resonate" with the experience of the researcher. The second aspect is that the experiences shared by the participant should be "plausible." For a researcher to know whether the shared experiences are "plausible", the researcher must have some knowledge of the context of the experience and therefore shows the importance of the researchers' insider experiences of the research focus (Anderson et al. 2007).

Ritzer (2005) put forward the argument that within narrative methods of data collection, it can be challenging to distinguish the participants' misconceptions or misunderstanding of a situation and this could impact on the validity of the data collected. According to my ontological and epistemological beliefs, conception and understanding are contextually and individually bound. The role of narrative inquiry is not to make judgements on

a participants' understanding of a situation, but to try to understand the experience from the participants' frame of reference; to understand as they understand (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014). Foucault (2002) discussed that all human experience is subjective; therefore, understanding is subjective. Dilthey (1894, as cited in Grondin, 2019: 253) argued that human experiences are bound within a context that will include different layers, including "historical social reality." Historical social reality relates to the contextual aspects of human experiences that will impact how a participant perceives the events they experience. As regards the current study, the political policies and societal expectations described in chapters 2 and 3 would influence the social reality, and this could affect how participants view their experiences.

Qualitative studies can use quantitative approaches to support and complement other qualitative data collection methods to achieve triangulation (Hussein, 2015). Triangulation is an ambiguous term that means different things to different people. Cohen et al. (2018) defined triangulation as adopting a mixed-methods approach to research through the collection of alternative data sets to strengthen or validate the research. Flick (2018: 87) articulated the rationale for triangulation as a "strategy to promote the quality of qualitative research." The adoption of a synthesised approach to data collection, however, could assume that the participants' shared experiences should not be considered valid in their own right. The objective of the current research was not to prove, refute or test the trustworthiness of shared experiences. The aim was to explore the shared experiences as the participants perceive them to be. Webster and Mertova (2007) discussed that by aiming for triangulation, the researcher is attempting to discover a singular truth. Richardson (2001) suggested that absolute truth is not possible, suggesting that truth differs depending on the perception of the person. The following section provides a discussion on the potential problem of researcher bias. The section discussed how bias can influence research and how this issue has been minimised in the current study.

4.13.1 **Problematising bias**

Maxwell (2005: 108) defined researcher bias as “the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory or pre-conclusions.” Whereas Cohen et al. (2018: 249) defined researcher bias as “how far personal biases, assumptions or values of the researcher….. affect the research.” Cohen et al. (2018) discussed that the way to improve the validity of research is to reduce or avoid researcher bias. Conversely, Maxwell (2005) argued that bias also relates to variance in values and rather than seeking to remove bias, the focus should be on understanding bias and how this might impact a study. The process of reflexive practice and reflection on research is one way that helps the researcher to understand their values and beliefs about the research. Maxwell (2005) continued that addressing the identification of areas of potential bias is related to integrity. Furthermore, Maxwell (2005: 108) cited Fred Hess who stated that “validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference, but of integrity (personal communication).”

Bickman and Rog (2009) suggested that eliminating bias is not possible in any social science research, and the focus should be on using research bias “productively.” My argument is that researcher bias could be framed as the researchers' knowledge of the research subject and therefore, is a necessary component in aiding the validity of the study, as the researcher will connect with aspects of the study, having had knowledge and experience of the topic (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Researcher bias connects with the researchers’ position within the research and is detailed within the following section.

4.13.2 **Problematizing positionality**

Cohen et al. (2018) defined positionality as the term that addresses the relationships that the researcher has with different aspects of the research study. Positionality relates to the researcher’s position within different components of the research and reflects the view of multiple selves. Kirby et al. (2006: 37) discussed the multiple facets of a researcher’s position within

the research as “double consciousness…dual perspective and double knowledge.” The double knowledge that Kirby et al. (2006) referred to here is the acknowledgement of multiple realities and multiple ways of knowing. Thorne and Bourke (2019) asserted that the honest account of how the researcher perceives their positionality within the research identifies potential “power structures, ideological assumptions and the social identities” of the researcher. The identification by the researcher of these structures helps to situate the “place and position within the scholarship of the field or discipline” (Thorne & Bourke, 2019: 2). Thorne and Bourke (2019) continued that the researcher’s positionality can evolve and shift throughout a research journey and expressed the importance of reflection in aiding the transition throughout time. They added that the identification of the researcher’s positionality is that it aids transparency and enables a more unobstructed view of the human instrument as a primary orchestrator in directing the research.

4.13.3 **Researcher positionality**

My positionality within the research has helped to guide the research questions, aims, and methodological choices made (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). My previous experience within the sector has helped to guide the research design through my understanding of who the participants might be and the professional world that they inhabit (Somekh & Lewin 2011). Anderson et al. (2007) discussed positionality in terms of being inside and/or outside the research. Both terms apply to my place within the research, making my positionality multifaceted (Simeon, 2015). I have experience of being an early years practitioner; experience of being a mother of children with identified SLCN and my position as a doctoral researcher. Each of these roles adds a layer to my positionality within the research. Due to this insider perspective, I felt that I could develop a relationship of trust with the participants (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). The participants expected that I would understand the professional sector vocabulary that they used within the conversation and the experiences they were sharing, therefore, the flow of the interviews were not disrupted with explanations. However, as I have not been an early years

practitioner working directly with children for over five years, there was an element of looking at the situation from the outside-in (Anderson et al. 2007).

I also have experience as a mother of children who were identified with SLCN. The parenting experiences provided an alternative facet to my position as a researcher. Webster and Mertova (2007) argued that it is impossible to disconnect from previous experience and experience is a necessary part of narrative research. My first-hand experiences helped to establish verisimilitude, in respect of whether the stories told resonated "with the experience of the researcher" (Webster & Mertova, 2007: 99).

My role as a researcher adds an alternative dynamic with potential power relationships. Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009), argued that the power relationship is not isolated to one of researcher-participant, but rather, this dynamic is interchangeable at different stages in the research process. Being aware of these limitations and taking conscious decisions on how they might impact the research helped to alleviate some potential limitations of this situation. The researcher position is interrelated with potential power imbalances, and this is discussed within the following section.

4.13.4 **Problematising potential power imbalances**

Power relations are contentious because power means different things to different people that alter by context (Thornborrow, 2014). Fairclough (2001: 27) discussed "ideological power" as "the power to project one's practices as universal and common sense.'" Fairclough (2001) posited the view that there are ways that people in power can retain it; through the act or threat of violence or through coercion and makes another person yield to the demands of another through consent. Foucault (1980: 142) stated that "there are no relations of power without resistances" indicating that for the power to exist, there must be an enforcer and a resister.

Power relationships within research are an essential consideration. Gringeri et al. (2013) debated power relationships within research and suggested that

the participant/researcher relationship provides opportunities for the researcher to be reflexive throughout the research process. The researcher has an ethical and moral obligation throughout the research process to address any potential power relationship tensions that could exist by identifying potential areas before starting the research (Gringeri et al. 2013). The power imbalance within the researcher/participant relationship can have other layers depending on any relationships the participant has with the researcher before the interview.

Power in research can manifest in many ways. Kvale and Bringman (2009: 33) highlighted that an interview of any kind is a “specific professional conversation.” The conversation, unlike general conversations, has an agenda, planned with a specific purpose in mind and both the researcher and the participant are aware of this; therefore, both will have expectations of the encounter (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Kvale and Brinkman (2009: 33) summarised what they termed “power asymmetry in qualitative research interviews.” Typical interviews place the researcher as the instigator of the interview process who decides and organises the logistics of the interview, such as time, place and topic. Typical interviews are one-directional with a question-and-answer dynamic led by the researcher. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) also discussed the interview as a form of manipulation where the researcher has a hidden agenda to elicit honest responses from the participant. These factors have the potential to cause the researcher to control the interview and exert power over the participant, and this may not be intentional.

In the case of the current study, I knew of thirteen of the fifteen participants through a professional capacity at various points in my professional career. The participants may have struggled to see me as a researcher and separate from the role(s) that I once held (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Costley et al. (2010: 56) put forward the point that the study design and recruitment processes of the researcher should consider potential power relationships. The selection of participants can affect the power dynamics of the researcher/participant and should, therefore, not be approached directly for

research involvement. Participant selection was considered during the current research design phase, as shown in the recruitment section of this chapter. As Costley et al. (2010) suggested, I did not directly approach any participants, I waited for the participants to come to me.

The location that the interview takes place within also has the potential to reflect power. Edwards and Holland (2013: 44) discussed that the place of interviews is symbolic of power relationships that could combine “positions in hierarchy of gender, class, age, ethnicity” or other factors such as the researcher and participant relationship that may pre-date the initial interview. Edwards and Holland (2013) argued that it might be difficult for participants to view the researcher in an alternative role to the one they know. Edwards and Holland (2013: 44) advised that the “micro-geographies of the research site” be considered when arranging interviews to minimise potential limitations that the place might create for the participant and cause an unintentional shift in the power dynamic.

Bowlby and Day (2018: 127) discussed power relationships within research and described it as an “emotional exchange” on behalf of both the researcher and the participant. The shifting of power relationships was also made by Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009), who argued that the power relationship is not isolated to one of researcher-participant but rather this dynamic is interchangeable at different stages in the research process. The participant has the right to engage (or not) in the research and to remain part of the research after the interview. Mills (2010) highlighted this point and stated that the issue of power during the research process is complex and shifting. A conversational interview allows for more flexibility in the researcher/participant dynamic by encouraging more control over the process by the participant (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). The conversational method is considered an egalitarian approach by working collaboratively with the participant so that the conversation is shared and co-authored (Karneli-Miller et al. 2009). Being aware and making conscious decisions about how to reduce power dynamics on all fronts can help to alleviate some potential challenges of this situation. Bowlby and Day (2018)

suggested that explaining the research process and emphasising that the participant can withdraw at any time, can help to allay some fears of the interviewee. I provided clear and honest explanations at all stages of the research as detailed within the ethics section of this chapter to ensure that the participant was fully aware of their rights throughout the research process. The discussion of power interrelates with ethical practice within the research. The following section discussed the ethical considerations of the current study and details the decisions made to ensure the ethical and integral conduct of the research.

4.14 Guiding principles in research

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) provides clear guidelines on ethical considerations for educational researchers. The use of the BERA guidance, the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA, 2015) Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers, along with the University of Lincoln Research Ethics Policy (2018), helped to guide and shape the research choices throughout the research process.

Wiles (2013: 13) identified that different useful frameworks help researchers to think about “moral behaviour” concerning the decisions made throughout the research process. The non-consequentialist approach assumes that if a researcher has made certain assurances to a participant, those assurances should be honoured regardless of the potential higher gain to society (Wiles, 2012: 13). Wiles (2012: 13) explained that a principlist approach is a form of the non-consequentialist approach that is based “on the principles of respect for people’s autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice in making and guiding ethical decisions in research.” Therefore, a principlist approach can be defined as the principles that guide the researcher in the decisions that are made throughout the research process. The four principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice are discussed concerning the current study throughout this section of the thesis. Each of these principles are value-driven, and as identified within the philosophical stance section of this chapter, values are subjective and hold a different

meaning to different individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Therefore, Rice (2011: 1) argued that a principlist approach can only be practical if “the principle which guides them is acceptable to all contracting persons and promotes the importance of moral agency.” Therefore, it is essential to consider whose principles are guiding the research and how those principles might impact on the participants. Although participants are carefully protected, it is not always possible to know how a question or a decision can affect another person as highlighted in the parent pilot study (see 4.4). However, as Wiles (2013) pointed out, concepts such as autonomy apply to participants deciding whether to engage in the study first and then whether they want to continue to be part of the research through the consent process.

BERA (2018) set out the researcher’s responsibilities concerning the participants, sponsors, the research community and the researcher’s own well-being and development. A fundamental process within research is gaining ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Committees (REC). Wiles (2013) highlights that the role of the REC is to ensure that the research proposal is both legally and morally appropriate. Ethical approval was gained twice throughout the current study. I gained ethical approval the first time through the University of Sheffield (see Appendix B). The pilot study (see 4.4) was conducted following ethical approval and then applied for again with the University of Lincoln (see Appendix P). Changes were made to the research question and study design as a result of the pilot study (see 4.5 & 4.7).

Gaining consent from participant forms part of the Ethical Guidance (BERA, 2018; EECERA, 2015). Wiles (2013) detailed that the process of consent involves ensuring that participants are fully aware of what the research aims to achieve, the reason for carrying out the research, if any third parties are funding the research, the potential benefits and risks of being involved in the research and what will happen to the data once collected. I informed the participants about these aspects in several ways. I provided a research information letter to all participants to inform them of what the research aim was, the potential benefits and risks and details of their involvement (see

Appendix L). A consent form was completed and verbally discussed before the start of the interview to explain again what the research was about, the participant's involvement, and what would happen to the data collected (see Appendix M).

Smythe and Murray (2005a) argued that within narrative research the process of consent is arbitrary as the participants cannot fully understand what they are consenting to until they have gone through the experience of the interview. Although the participants will have an understanding of the focus of the research and the interview process through the information letter, they may not know in advance what they will share. The process of conversational interviews is an organic process that develops and grows. The researcher may have a rough idea of the themes that might be discussed (Wells, 2011) but cannot know what stories and experiences are likely to be shared as these are unique to each participant (Clandinin, 2016). Therefore, consent should be negotiated at different points of the research process (Smythe & Murray, 2005a).

Each participant was asked to confirm their electronic consent to the transcript following the interview, and I made it clear that I could not use the data without confirmation. The process ensured transparency for the participant and ensured that consent was a progressive process that the participant could opt out of at any stage (Berg, 2016). The participants' right of withdrawal was made clear verbally and in writing at each stage of the process. Sieber and Tolich (2013) stated that the iterative process of consent throughout the narrative research process, not only enables the participant to withdraw at any time but also provides them with the opportunity to negotiate and re-negotiate their consent throughout the process.

Beneficence is the guiding principle of the benefits the research might reasonably expect to bring to society (Resnik, 2018). Resnik (2018) argued that participants have a reasonable expectation that their contribution to the research is needed to achieve societal gain. The benefits and gains of research are driven by a value system that differs from person to person.

Therefore, a clear articulation of the researchers' vision of benefit or gain to participants is necessary, who can determine whether they also perceive benefits or gains and are part of Rice's moral contract (2011). My vision relating to benefit and gain to the participants, was clearly articulated in an information letter (see appendix L) sent to the participants prior to the interview date, and then discussed verbally at the start of the interview. The current research was self-funded and therefore, did not have any responsibilities to sponsors identified within the Guidance (BERA, 2018). I was mindful, however, of my responsibilities towards my employers, Sheffield and Lincoln Universities, and my supervisors who guided me during the whole process.

The principle of non-maleficence relates to the participant expectation of the researcher in trusting that the researcher will not act in any way that could cause harm (Resnik, 2018). Harm may be caused intentionally and unintentionally due to the subjective nature of what the person perceives as harm (Cooksey & McDonald, 2019: 692). Efforts to reduce harm is through the moral contract depicted by Rice (2011) that informs the participant of what the research is about, what it entails, and how the researcher intends to use the data (see Appendices E & F). The guiding principle of “to do no harm” (BERA, 2018) was adhered to strictly and was instrumental in the changes made during the pilot stage of the research. Snowden (2014: 13) highlighted that there are tensions within doctoral research between providing an original contribution to knowledge and ethical principles that can inhibit the research process. Snowden (2014: 13) stated that the principle of “to do no harm” should be balanced with the good that the research could do. Concerning the research pilot process, two of the four parent participants showed signs of distress, resulting in changes to the study design. Furthermore, at the request of one participant in the current study, I demonstrated the guiding principle of trust by removing excerpts in the interview transcript that emphasised the moral contract that supported decisions made throughout the research process.

The principlist approach detailed by Wiles (2013) guided all stages of the research. The moral contract discussed by Rice (2011) aided in collaboratively engaging with participants throughout the research process. The moral contract ensured a connection between mine and participants' principles and values and was negotiated continuously throughout the study. The following sections demonstrated how principles guided the research decisions.

4.14.1 **Responsibility of the narrative researcher**

The responsibility of the researcher is multifaceted. The previous section explored the issues of the guiding principles of research. The researcher's responsibility in driving and negotiating the principles for a shared understanding was discussed. Edge (2011: 26) discussed the intellectual exchange that researchers engage in with the hope that it will positively affect praxis. Madhu (2015: 14), drawing on the work of Marx, defined praxis, as an activity that is either in process, due to be processed or is already processed. Therefore, interaction with the research process, according to Edge (2011) will affect the future activities of the researcher. Attia and Edge (2017) explained the process of intention and action as congruence, is demonstrated when the researcher honoured the underpinning philosophical stance and principles detailed within the research.

Pillow (2003) discussed the researcher responsibilities throughout the research process and argued that there could be dissonance between who the researcher is and what the researcher believes and how this ultimately impacts on the researcher's interpretation of the data as new knowledge. Through honest reflective and reflexive practice, the researcher can demonstrate "insight into how this knowledge is produced" (Pillow, 2003: 178). Hertz (1997) discussed an alternative view of reflexivity as the researcher's companion that provides a conversation with self to provide a way of rationalising and thrashing out complexities within the research to explore how or if they fit and to question what it added to understanding the research.

Smythe and Murray (2005a) suggested that the researcher's responsibility extends beyond the data collection process. There is the potential for causing harm to the participants in having a personal story interpreted or reinterpreted in a way that they were not anticipating in order to make the pieces fit (Smythe & Murray, 2005b). The role of the researcher is to capture the participants' story and then interpret the shared narratives (Connolly & Clandinin, 2006). The interpretation could happen in a way that the participant did not fully comprehend when sharing their experience. As discussed within the section on narrative hermeneutics, the research aimed to understand the experience as the participants understand. Although interpretation is a factor of narrative research, the aim was not to change the stories through the process of understanding, rather to retain the authenticity of the shared experiences (Riessman, 2008).

Within the current study, several checks were included in the study design to minimise the risk of misinterpretation of the stories. The confirmation of the transcript of the interview with each participant formed one of the checks (discussed in section 1.1). The next check was to offer participants the opportunity to talk through the data analysis process to check to understand the point that they made (see Appendix O). In this way, the consent was renegotiated as participants had the opportunity to contribute to the process of analysis (Smythe & Murray, 2005b: 187). The approach also supported the thread of co-authorship, as discussed in section 4.3.1. The process of involving participants also helped to build trust through collaboration and corroboration, as discussed by Attia and Edge (2017). The following section explores the ethical guiding principles of confidentiality and anonymity and how these principles applied to the current study.

4.14.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy form one of the five guiding ethical principles of research (BERA, 2018:4). Smythe and Murray (2005a) highlighted that because of the personal nature of the shared individual stories within narrative research, participants could make themselves vulnerable to repercussions if the story was recognised by one of the characters within the story. Scott Jones (2017) discussed the tension researchers face between the desire to add contextualised information that helps the reader to understand the study in more depth, and the ethical principles of protecting privacy and doing no harm. However, Smythe and Murray (2005a) determined that it is the researchers' responsibility to protect the participants from being recognised. I took efforts to protect the participants by not disclosing identities or locations throughout the process. To have disclosed the exact locations would possibly have made the participants identifiable to readers of the research. Due to the nature of the experiences shared by the participants about personal working relationships, including the children they discussed, location anonymity was assured to each participant before the interviews began and formed part of the ethical approval process for the study. Within the following chapters participants were given a pseudonym to further protect their anonymity.

4.14.3 Storage and protection of data

The collection and storage of data is an ethical consideration for any researcher. It is the researchers' responsibility to ensure that all data collected is stored and only used for the purposes collected. The consent form identified the intended purposes of the data that was collected (see Appendix M). All data are and will continue to be, stored on a password-protected personal cloud, a password encrypted device that is stored in a locked drawer. The signed consent forms and the documentation gathered throughout the research process are stored in a locked drawer in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (2016) and the General Data Protection

Regulations (Data Protection Act, 2018). The signed consent forms are stored in a separate location to the interview transcripts to further reduce the chance of participants being identified.

4.14.4 **Summary**

This chapter detailed the journey taken throughout the research process and included the identification of my ontological perspective as relativist that acknowledges that individuals can perceive similar events differently depending upon their previous experiences. My epistemological perspective was identified as constructivist that acknowledges knowledge is a social construct that changes and transforms individual perception. The philosophical stance taken within the research aligned to my ontological and epistemological perspectives was narrative hermeneutics that sought to understand participants experiences as the participants understand (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The pilot study was a pivotal point in the design process and created an opportunity to evaluate my values and beliefs. The reflections made during this time helped to shape my understanding of narrative inquiry and in turn, this understanding aided in capturing the rich experiences that were shared by practitioners. The shared experiences provided a window into each participant's world through conversational interviews that provided a platform for the practitioner and I as the researcher to engage within on a co-creator/co-authored way (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010). The sharing of the experience through conversation enabled a rich discussion that illuminated the practitioner's experiences, triumphs and challenges. Ethical principles were detailed and discussed and observed throughout the research process.

The chapter provided an illustration of the synthesised analytical process that was used to interpret the participants experiences through a hybrid structural framework combined with a constructivist grounded theory approach. This analysis is evident within the following findings and discussion chapters.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

The chapter contains two main sections: conformity through compliance and the prioritisation, organisation and deployment of resources. The first part of the chapter focusses on the participant focussing on who they are, their journey into the early years sector and the influences to their practice that shape their perceptions. The chapter identifies the participant's experiences and motivation of engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) and how those experiences have supported their understanding of assessment and their perspectives towards the colleagues with whom they work. The participants share their experiences of learning from others within the sector, including colleagues, children, parents and external agencies to support and underpin their knowledge and understanding of language development.

The participants discussed the methods of assessment that they used within the setting to identify speech language and communication needs (SLCN). The section identifies and explores the challenges that sometimes influence how and what aspects of development they assess. The influence of external factors such as the Local Authority (LA) and Ofsted on assessment procedures that appear to focus on data and accountability in supporting children to reach the expected levels of development in each Early Learning Goals (ELG) are discussed (DfE, 2012b). The participants locations will be identified within discussions as Location 1 (L1) and Location 2 (L2) when appropriate. Throughout the first section of the chapter, the participants express their frustration and apparent disillusionment of the current tools used in the assessment and identification of SLCN. However, the participants also appeared to conform to the guidance and requests made of them through local and national government bodies, even in situations where there was no legal requirement to do so, demonstrating compliance.

The second section of the chapter explores the prioritisation, organisation and deployment of support services and strategies accessible to the participants when supporting children within the setting. Throughout both sections, the similarities and differences between the two geographical locations are explored to identify how the participants in each of these areas support two-year-old children with identified SLCN. I allocated the following pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants: Mia, Ruby, Corrie, Keyleigh, Caurtney, Chloe, Kailah, Evie, Georgia, Ferne, Freya, Aleigha, Megan, Poppy and Ayla and allocated codes to identify each participant (see Appendix G). The main findings are summarised in the table below:

Table 7: Summary of main findings

Expectation and motivation for continual professional development	• Expectation and motivation for continuous professional development • Motivation • Learning from experience
Normalisation and accountability control measures	• Data as a control mechanism for accountability • Assessing children • Open to interpretation • Responsibility for assessment • Participant understanding of language development • Parents
Prioritisation, Organisation and Deployment of resources	• External support through the Local Health Authority • Health Visitors • Speech and language therapy services • Process of referrals to SLT • Waiting times • SLT Support Strategies • Training provided by SLT services. • SLT support sheets
Support	• Local authority 1 support • Local Authority 2 Support • Funding to Support Children • Internal support

5.2 Introduction to the participants

The following section introduces the participants of the current study and focusses on their routes in the early years sector (see Appendix J). As there were fifteen participants, it was not possible to provide all of their stories, therefore, four participants were chosen to illuminate the potential routes into the sector that are representative of the general early years workforce.

Practitioners' routes into early years vary from direct entry following a college course or as a later career decision made because of their life choices. Of the fifteen participants, nine followed a direct entry into the early years sector, and the other six went into the sector later in their lives. The following section provides a snapshot into the routes that four of the fifteen participants took when deciding to embark on a career in the early childhood sector to provide a contextual overview of the participants in the current study. The four participant vignettes selected for this section highlight the various directions taken by participants in the current study into the early years sector and help provide a context for the experiences they shared. For an in-depth profile of the participants, please see 4.11.

Kailah highlighted her journey through the early years:

> *I went to college and did my level three in childcare .. once completed that I.. got a job working in a nursery …I think six.. months later, I was room leader there. A job came up somewhere else for a toddler room leader, so I went for the job and got it..within eight months I was deputy manager and ..within the four months was ..manager. So…I job share[d] the manager role. I then took a break to have my children ..then came back into childcare going … to university to study for my foundation degree .. and I now work … in a newly opened nursery* (P4:L1:K).

Kailah's story highlighted the career path that she took into the early years sector. Kailah discussed always wanting to work with children and therefore decided to follow the direct entry from school to college and then into the

workplace. Keyleigh also discussed choosing the early years as a career option from school and stated:

> *I decided to do childcare I didn't have very good GCSE's so I started off and I did my level 1 in child care, then went on to do my level 2 at college, then got a job as a nursery assistant*

Keyleigh's comment appeared to suggest that she chose childcare as an option because of her exam results at school and resonates with Nutbrown's (2012: 9) discussion on reasons for choosing early years as a career path for this reason.

The six participants shared their experiences of choosing a career in early years. All the participants who came into the early years sector later and did not choose the career from leaving school had children. The flexibility of the role could be a reason that the participants worked in the early years following the birth of their children. Ruby stated that she had worked as a child-minder as it afforded her the flexibility of working around her children and still paying the bills. Ruby stated:

> *Twenty-seven years since I've been registered. I originally started because I was suddenly left with two children and a mortgage to pay, and needed somehow to [pay] a mortgage, and they'd lost one parent … plus...I'd always loved kids, always called mother hen and it just came the natural choice.. to do.....to be able to make a living and pay the mortgage at the same time* (P10:L2:R).

Similarly, Aleigha shared her experiences of joining the early years sector after volunteering in a pre-school:

> *I've been in practice three years now, just coming up…..I was a stay at home mum for …seven years and before that was office work, nothing to do with children what-so-ever because I really like working with children particularly young ones and particularly ones with special needs, which has stemmed from my middle child who has special needs as well so… It just started off volunteering for a few months,*

and then I was offered a position that erm…., and I took it up, and I stayed there ever since (P:15:L1:A).

The four stories above represent three different entry points into the early years sector. Kailah chose early years as a career straight from school and took a career break to have her children and then returned to the sector. Ruby chose to work in the early years as a child-minder as a convenient way of being at home to care for her children and survive financially as a single parent. Aleigha began working as a parent volunteer in her child's pre-school program in the early years before taking a paid permanent position. The selected four stories demonstrate the different routes into the early years that are representative of the early years workforce. The stories are helpful in positioning the participants in relation to how they understand the experiences that they share throughout the chapter.

5.3 Overview of the children

The following section provides a brief overview of the children that were discussed within the conversational interviews. The section aims to provide a context for the reader of the complexities that the participants face when identifying, assessing and supporting children with SLCN.

The fifteen participants involved in the study discussed a total of forty-four children during their interviews. The participant's stories of working with the children helped to illuminate their experiences as they discussed various aspects of the children's development and how the children's development was assessed and supported (see Appendix Q for an excerpt of an extracted child story told by Kailah). Of the forty-four children, thirty-six were male, and eight were female. This finding is similar to other studies where more males presented with SLCN than females (Dockrell et al. 2014; Hayes et al. 2012; Mcleod et al. 2017; Meschi et al. 2010). Of the forty-four children, twenty children met the criteria for a speech, language and communication need (SLCN), as a primary area of need, as defined in the SENDCoP (DfE, 2015).

The other twenty-four children had other primary areas of need where SLCN was a contributing factor. For example, ten of the children discussed (eight male, two female), had either a diagnosis of autism or were going through the process of diagnosis. The primary area of need is significant due to the availability of funding opportunities and support strategies for the child. Speech and language delay, for example, is thought to be a factor in other developmental conditions (Lindsay et al. 2008). Therefore, a speech and language need could form part of a larger picture for conditions such as autism and global delay.

5.4 Normalisation through expected levels of development

The following section explores the expectations placed on the participants concerning CPD and assessment processes. The section identifies the structures that appear to be in place to guide the participants in their assessment decisions with the aim of ensuring all children achieve expected levels of development as set out in the government guidance (DfE, 2012b). The use of data to normalise development is discussed to demonstrate the structures that appeared to be evident within daily practice that sought to achieve this aim.

5.4.1 Expectation and motivation for continuous professional development

This section identifies the expectation placed upon practitioners to engage in CPD as part of their role. For this thesis, the term CPD refers to formal and informal training that the participants engaged with that may or may not have resulted in a formal qualification. The CPD opportunities that practitioners engaged with have a direct impact on their ability to identify and provide support strategies children with SLCN. The following section explores the CPD opportunities that the participants engaged with that helped to shape their views.

Eight of the participants discussed the qualifications that they had taken and the extent to which they included speech and language development (SLD). Six of the eight stated that the qualification did touch on SLD to varying degrees. Ferne, Evie, Caurtney and Ruby all appeared to have difficulty recalling whether the qualifications taken included SLD. Ruby stated: "*a lot of it touched on speech and language because it was all childcare, so maybe not very specifically in areas"* (P10:L2:R). Ferne was confident that she had covered SLD but could not remember what the work had comprised of: "*I've definitely had units on speech and language. I just can't remember what the work consisted of*"(P3:L2:FE). The participants' responses suggested that although their qualifications included SLD, it was superficial as they struggled to remember what they covered. The finding could suggest that it would be difficult for the participants to recall what they had learnt to support their practice when working with young children. Two of the eight participants reported that the qualifications they had taken did not cover SLD. The finding could suggest that there appeared to be a disconnect between policy and research that highlighted the importance of SLD to children's long-term attainment and wellbeing, and the opportunities of practitioners to support children's SLD. The finding appeared to support Hall's (2005) research that many of the courses designed for practitioners either do not contain SLD at all or cover the topic at a superficial level. The finding suggested that there appeared to be little improvement in the course content related to SLD between 2005 when Hall's research was conducted and 2017-2018 when the interviews took place.

Specific training for speech and language varied across participants and geographical areas. Participants from both locations had some commonalities and differences in the training that appeared to be available to them. Poppy and Ayla from L2 were both SENDCos and attended the SENDCo training. Poppy explained that the training included a full day on communication and interaction; however, stressed the focus of the training was the referral process for applying for additional support. Poppy stated the training "*focuses on the referral process …so you know what you're doing when … putting referrals …through to an EHCP*" (P12:L2:P). Poppy's

comment appeared to suggest that the SENDCo early years training provided by the LA focused on administrative tasks that might reduce labour through errors in forms, rather than aiding an understanding of special educational needs.

Chloe was also a SENDCo, and at the time of the interview, she had still not completed the SENDCo training. Chloe stated: "*I'd only just taken on the role of SENDCo in January I've not had any SENDCo training, so it's all stuff that I've found out myself*" (P9:L1:C). The interview took place in the May following Chloe's appointment; however, during a follow-up discussion with Chloe, eighteen months after Chloe's appointment, she still had not received the SENDCo training and ended up leaving the setting. Within a school setting, only a qualified teacher can take the SENDCo training, and it involves training for up to two years. Any member of staff may be eligible for the SENDCo role in the early years field, and training is not compulsory as it is in school environments (DfE, 2015). Local authorities may offer a course that is typically over three days, usually during the week, and can, therefore, be challenging for settings to release practitioners to attend, as in Chloe's experience. Several reasons could be related to the variations between the approaches to SENDCo preparation from school and the early years setting perspectives. The school SENDCo training is expensive, and it might be considered unlikely that practitioners could afford the fees. The course is up to two years, and as Chloe has highlighted, settings struggled to release staff for three days. The way the government have shaped early years provision concerning funding, ratios and statutory requirements, have created a situation that makes it difficult for settings to facilitate CPD opportunities. Stewart and Waldgogel (2017) highlighted this point and stated the removal of government support strategies to aid CPD in the early years sector, has resulted in a skills deficit (McAlees, 2019).

Due to the financial sustainability factors that the early years sector was experiencing at the time of the interviews (see 2.4.3), participants discussed that there was an increasing expectation that they should pay for any training they chose to do. However, Gaunt (2018a) pointed out that organising

training was problematic for individual settings; even if the practitioner self-funded training, the setting had to employ someone to cover the time the practitioner would be absent. The only training that some settings will pay for is the statutory training, such as first aid and safeguarding training. Mia stated, "*the only one [course] I actually needed …. was safeguarding, and that's the only one they would pay for*" (P1:L1:M). The participants appeared to sympathise with their employers and accepted that CPD was part of their professional roles and the expectation they would pay for non-statutory training opportunities. Mia commented: "*if we source the training we would have to pay for it,"* (P1:L1:M), although Mia continued that she was happy to pay for courses as they aided her CPD. Evie commented that self-funding training was not "*very practical*" (P5:L1:E) however, conceded that it was part of her role. Although Evie said that self-funded training came down to a personal decision on how much the practitioner wanted to help the child "it's *whether you want to help them any more than you already do*" (P5:L1:E). Evie's comment appeared to suggest that there is an internal struggle for practitioners. The struggle emphasises the balance between going above and beyond delivering the minimum levels of education and care to self-fund training and the practitioners financial situation that could create a barrier to attending training.

Freya, who worked in L2, also talked about training and suggested that although the setting will pay for any training that she attended, if she were to leave the setting, the cost of the training would need to be repaid. Freya commented: *"if you leave the job that you're in within three years of doing it …you have to pay them back*" (P2:L2:FR). Russell (2018) highlighted the challenging financial situation of the early years sector that appeared to be exploring ways to keep the costs down. The expectation for self-funded training could be an approach to reduce costs by settings. Self-funded training shifts the responsibility for training from the government and the early years provider to the individual practitioner. Ceeda (2018) and Akhal (2019) found that practitioners cited low pay as a reason for leaving the sector, and therefore, the additional expectation of funding courses may add to the pressure experienced by practitioners. The participants who discussed self-

funding CPD were from L1, suggesting that this is more of an issue in that location. L2 participants may not have needed to self-fund CPD because of the range of LA organised training in L2 (see 3.6). Self-funded training therefore, added additional layers to undertaking training and suggested additional motivation from participants when choosing to engage in CPD as discussed in the following section.

5.4.2 **Motivation**

Practitioner motivation was a factor for practitioners in deciding to undertake training. Chloe and Megan raised the reluctance of some of their colleagues to get involved in training. Chloe reflected: "*I don't think they [the previous SENDCo] ..did any … CPD…they did to me the bare minimum like the mandatory courses*" (P9:L1:C). Chloe continued that sometimes practitioners are: "*as qualified as they wanted to be*" (P9:L1:C). Chloe appeared to feel that some practitioners she worked with lacked the motivation to engage with CPD opportunities; she stated: "*they didn't want to push themselves … therefore they hadn't got that enhanced knowledge, or you know the theory*" (P9:L1:C). Megan also discussed colleagues who appeared reluctant to engage in CPD, "*I know a few of them who don't want to go further"* (P6:L1:M). The participants appeared to feel that the colleagues they worked with were reluctant to engage in developing their skills; however, their attitudes could reflect the challenges that practitioners can experience with training discussed above.

Conversely, Megan and Ayla both discussed their enthusiasm to attend training that might be on offer. Mia stated, "*since then, I've done any courses that they would throw at me, to be honest*" (P1:L1:M). Megan reflected on the importance of training and her frustration at colleagues who were not as enthusiastic as her to embrace training opportunities:

> *it is important ... when you do it yourself and then see one of them not wanting to do it, you don't understand why they don't want to improve themselves or let themselves go further* (P6:L1:M).

Megan also highlighted the importance of self-motivation concerning training: "*I wouldn't be here now if it weren't for myself trying, no one else is going to do if for you are they?"* (P6:L1:M). The participants appeared to create the perspective that engaging in CPD depends on various factors. Self-motivation seems to be a crucial factor because of the personal costs and additional time it takes for travel and preparation to undertake training. The participants appeared to agree that training was beneficial to their practice, evidenced through the training that they attended, qualification level achieved, and the comments made during the interview.

5.4.3 **Learning from experience**

The reduced prospects for engaging in formal CPD opportunities created more emphasis on practitioners to utilise the experiences and training of others. McAlees (2019) highlighted that the sector was experiencing large volumes of staff turnover. Follow-up visits with the participants highlighted that of the fifteen participants interviewed, three remain in the same setting, one has taken a different role within the same setting, four have moved to a different setting in the same role, and seven have left the role and taken related roles within the sector but no longer work in early years settings. The migration of staff appeared to support McAlees's (2019) findings on staff turnover. Continuous professional development can also involve learning through the expertise of others besides the children with whom they have worked.

The participants discussed their experiences of working in the early years and how they had learnt from their experiences. The children that the participants worked with were instrumental in how they had developed their skills in supporting the children with whom they have worked. Kailah stated: "*because of .. experience, you can start doing a few things that you've previously done*" (P4:L1:K). Aleigha said: "*there are a lot of things that I've learnt just from being here that I would never thought of just the way that I do things*" *(P:15:L1:A).* Kailah and Aleigha's comments appeared to show that skills are developed by day-to-day working with children so that strategies

considered by colleagues' feedback or trial and error helped in developing approaches to support future engagements with children.

Ayla commented on the skills she had gained from practice. Ayla worked in an early years setting with high proportions of Polish children that necessitated learning an additional language to help support children in their home language. Ayla said: *"my Polish is excellent now as well yes, I learn so much, I must say that actually all of us in the setting we all know some Polish"* (P13:L2:A). Ayla's comment appeared to demonstrate the need for practitioners to adapt their skills to suit the needs of the children within the setting through learning on the job and developing skills responsive to the needs of the children. Cotton (2013) termed this process as professional learning and suggested that learning occurs through the exchange of knowledge and experience with other practitioners.

5.5 Normalisation and accountability control measures

The following section explores the focus on controlling normalised development levels through accountability procedures both within the participant's setting and from external sources such as Ofsted and the LA. The section explores the participants experiences of interacting and engaging with these procedures in the experiences that they shared.

The participants appeared to perceive the primary purpose of assessment as a vehicle to establish the child's level of development, measured against the EYFS Development Matters Framework (DfE, 2012b). The participants appeared to accept that assessment was part of their role and complied through collecting data in the form of observations. Participants discussed the emphasis within their settings on tracking the individual development progress of children within the setting. The purposes for tracking development appeared to focus around the need to maintain developmental norms to ensure that children were developing within the expected levels of development for their age and stage, across all areas of learning and as an accountability measure.

5.5.1 Data as a control mechanism for maintaining normative levels of development

The following section explores how the participants shared their experiences of collating data based on child observations, that served as a control mechanism to highlight children at the below or emerging stage of achieving the ELG (Glazzard, 2014). Nine of the participants addressed the tracking of children's development using assessment data collected to provide a summary of the age and development stage of the child. Poppy, Chloe, Corrie and Keyleigh discussed tracking children's development using an online software programme called Tapestry. Tapestry was designed around the EYFS (DfE, 2012b), and prompted participants to link assessments to the ELG that created a child development profile across all areas of learning and each ELG. Keyleigh highlighted Tapestry enables simultaneous tracking of child cohorts.

> *I can look at the whole nursery… its …of red, green and blue, red their below, green their on target, blue their above so I can at a glimpse… look at all the observations and see exactly where all the children are* (P8:L1:K).

Keyleigh went on to say that if she noticed any gaps in the children's profiles against an ELG, she spoke to the child's key worker to find out why there are gaps. Keyleigh's approach could indicate a focus on covering all seventeen ELG's and therefore suggested a data-driven approach to assessment. The underpinning principle of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) was to follow children's interests and therefore, it could be feasible that the child may not have chosen an activity that specifically related to an ELG. The apparent need for Keyleigh to fill this gap suggested that she could perceive all areas of learning and every ELG as needing to be measured.

For those children who are below the ELG for their chronological age, targeted interventions are created to: "*help them and bring them up to where they need to be*" (P8:L1:K). Keyleigh's comment appeared to link to the point

of Armstrong (1995), where he questioned the use of surveillance measures to maintain developmental norms. The identification of children who were not at expected levels of development promoted the implementation of strategies to bring them back into expected or normative developmental ranges.

Caurtney's setting also tracked development, however, appeared to use the Development Overview resources provided as part of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). Caurtney discussed conversations with her headteacher:

> *we have.. a .. Target tracker **...** sometimes she will come to me and say **'**hmmm do you think this is right? **'**and we'll have a big discussion about it and **'**I think if you've got to high or I think you've marked them too low'* (P7:L1:C).

Caurtney's point could show that although she was the practitioner assessing the child, her professional judgement could be challenged if the result does not comply with an expected result. Here, the assessment result was altered. The findings supported previous discussions about the subjectivity of the EYFS through alternative interpretations. In Caurtney's case, the head teacher's perception appeared to be more valued than Caurtney's, possibly because of experience and level of qualification, suggesting a hierarchical decision-making process. However, within England, a manager only requires a level three qualification and no minimum level of experience (DfE, 2015); in this situation, a hierarchical process could create inaccurate data.

The examples given show that all the assessment data collected by the settings evaluated children's development against the EYFS Development Matters Framework (DfE, 2012b). In the examples above, all (except for Caurtney), the participants were managers or deputy managers. Managers and deputy managers monitored all children's development in settings in which they work. The results are significant as managers provided an additional perspective on what happens in speech and language assessments and how the data are used. The findings appeared to support the suggestion that assessment focusses on expected levels of attainment as a measure of child achievement.

5.5.2 **Data as a control mechanism for accountability**

The following section explores the participants experiences of the use of data as a control mechanism for accountability. The section explores the response of managers within settings and in some cases the LA, in responding to children who may not be assessed as at the expected level of development (Glazzard, 2014).

Participants explored the use of data collected through child assessments. Six of the participants discussed assessment as a drive for the collection of data. Poppy and Corrie discussed the LA as the vehicle that drove the need for data. Poppy discussed the pressure to send the data collected from assessments to the LA. Poppy said: "*we send all our data to early years [LA], three times a year, and they'll come back to us and tell us where the gaps are*" (P12:L2:P). Corrie also discussed being contacted from the LA to challenge children's development profiles:

> *the data I send to the local authority they will then ring me, or someone will come in, and they'll say, this child, this child and this child they're red they're behind**.....** what you doing, why are they behind, blah, blah sometimes that child's just immature, why can't that child at two, be slightly behind in one area? (P14:L2:C)*

Although both participants appeared to disagree with assessments motivated by the need to collect data, both responded to data requests. The only statutory assessments that practitioners are mandated to conduct is the Integrated Review at two-years-old and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at the end of the foundation year (DfE, 2017a). However, there appeared to be an expectation of practitioners from the LA in L2 for periodic updates on the children's development rates, and both participants discussed complying with the expectation. The finding resonated with research by Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, (2016) who found that practitioners felt overwhelmed by the volume of data they were expected to collect and the pressure to track and evidence children's progress. Both participants discussed the focus on practitioners' accountability in ensuring children meet

their expected age and stage development levels. The pressure to ensure that all children are at expected levels of development was evident in both examples above. Hutchings (2015) and Brill et al. (2018) discussed accountability and suggested compelling practitioners to maintain expected levels of development, not only increased pressure on the practitioner, but also on the child. Besides, target focused measures can lead to feelings of failure from the practitioner and the child (Hutchings, 2015: 4).

Kailah discussed the need to collect assessment-based evidence from an Ofsted monitoring perspective. Kailah said: *"Ofsted ….come in and say 'Which one's your key children tell me where that child's sat at.' But like I say it's having …I hate the word, 'evidence' to say that that child can do it*" (P4:L1:K). Kailah was discussing moderation processes within settings to gain a more detailed view of the child's development. Kailah identified the need for the key person to have a confident understanding of the child's development, to enable a discussion during an Ofsted inspection and therefore, links back to the earlier discussion on assessment for accountability purposes. The participant appeared to dislike the word **'**evidence**'** however, engaged in collecting evidence in the form of developmental observations tied to ELG's complying with her perception of Ofsted expectations. The finding suggested that although Kailah seemed to feel strongly about collecting evidence, she appeared fearful of Ofsted who passed judgement on the setting and the practitioners (DfE, 2013a).

Chloe was a deputy manager and SENDCo of a setting at the time of the interview. Chloe discussed her role in ensuring that the practitioners within her setting also complied with perceived expectations. Chloe said: *"we'll speak to the members of staff and say you know 'can you justify why you put in there what evidence is there*?'" (P9:L1:C). The perception appeared to be that without **'**evidence**'** the practitioner's assessment of the child's ability, is invalidated. The finding could suggest that the participants' perception, therefore, is that a practitioner's judgement is not valued and required validation through **'**evidence**'** or proof-based documentation. Also, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) suggested that data-driven

assessments can sway the point of the assessment in a particular direction, possibly affecting the reliability of the assessment.

Aleigha discussed the need to collect assessment-based evidence from the perspective of gaining support for the children in her care. In this context, external agencies appeared to require data-based evidence as a justification that the child needed additional support. Aleigha stated: “it’s *based on the assessments that we do on the EYFS and the ages and stages, and it is literally ‘this is where they should be that’s not where they are’ so it gets highlighted as a concern*” *(P:15:L1:A).* Aleigha’s statement that children should be at a specific level supports the notion of the normalisation or standardisation discussed in section 2.9. Armstrong (1995) raised concerns about the attempt to normalise children’s development due to the differing rates that children develop. Armstrong (1995) suggested that by identifying normative development through the use of averages, assumed that any child outside of these normative parameters is by definition, abnormal, leading to feelings of failure discussed by Hutchings (2015).

5.5.3 **Assessing children**

This section identifies and evaluates the tools that are used by participants to assess children. As discussed within section 0 of the literature chapter, the primary tool used by practitioners to assess children**’**s development is the EYFS Development Matters documentation (DfE, 2012b). All fifteen participants within the study confirmed the use of the EYFS as an assessment tool. The participants all discussed the challenges of using the EYFS to assess children. The main challenges appeared to be the lack of specificity of the EYFS as a tool in defining development within the ages and stages of development, the ambiguity of the assessment caused by individual interpretation of the EYFS and how the EYFS can be used as a tick list to check off children**’**s development. Each of these points are discussed in the following section.

5.5.4 **Open to interpretation**

A significant finding related to the tools that participants used to assess children and the perceived ambiguity of the tool. Nine of the participants discussed that the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) was open to interpretation. The ambiguity meant that child assessment focused on a range of factors which influenced how practitioners measured children's development levels against the ELG. Evie stated:

> ***…*** *the way it was worded he didn't really meet any of them even in the really low stages he didn't meet any of those but because ..he has to meet the first one before you can move him on to the next one. So, it's really hard to .. assess him* (P5:L1:E).

Some participants discussed ensuring the child was secure in one ELG before they could progress to another ELG within the same age and stage and area of learning. Mia stated: ***"****our management like us to more or less fill one box before we move to the next****"*** (P1:L1:M). Mia's comment suggested that each ELG is used as a box to label completion before moving to the next ELG. The original EYFS design was not intended as a sequential assessment process. The design of the ELG's allowed for the differences in children's development rates. However, eight of the participants discussed the tick box nature of the EYFS. Ferne stated that throughout the observations she carries out she was: "*constantly checking but does it go to that*" (P3:L2:FE). Ferne appeared to be discussing the need to link all observations to an ELG. Ferne stated that she questioned her professional judgement. However, the interpretation of the guidance can lead to ambiguity through the encouragement of practitioners to make "best-fit judgements" regarding a child's development (DfE, 2013a: 3). Ferne stated:

> *I'm in two minds when I'm with the children I'm thinking* ***'****oh they're really clever****'*** *but then by this they're not really clever or they're miles ahead compared to what their age is, I think its* ***….*** *a tick list* (P3:L2:FE).

Evie's earlier comment relating to the wording in the EYFS appeared to suggest that the wording is interpreted literally by some practitioners. The interpretation could be hindering the assessment of children's development if no other assessment tools are used to support the understanding of the children's development. Poppy discussed how the EYFS is open to interpretation, and this can make assessment decisions tricky. Poppy said: "*how its interpreted, so how I read it and how some of my practitioners read it is completely different*" (P12:L2:P). Chloe expressed a similar view and states that the ages and stages are: "*broad…and it's also down to the practitioners' perspective on whether that child can or not. I don't think there's a consistent tool for assessing children*" (P9:L1:C). The participants appeared to be saying that the wording of the ELG statements are broad and therefore allowed for interpretation. The interpretation can be problematic and create inconsistencies in judgements as highlighted in the DfE paper by Cotzias and Whitehorn (2013).

The participants reflected the perceived subjectivity of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) in the examples above. The initial design of the EYFS was as a framework of guidance for practitioners to help to guide practice as discussed within section 2.7.1. The apparent interpretation of the application of the EYFS across the participants involved in the current study, suggested that each setting has a preferred way of applying the framework.

Megan also appeared to suggest that the interpretation of the EYFS can be challenging. Megan stated: "*its hit and miss*" (P6:L1:M) expressing her frustration of trying to fit an observation into a specific ELG. Megan continued:

> *I think sometimes you go straight to it and you think, 'oh no he's not hitting that, he's a bit in that, and he's a bit in that one, but he's not getting both of them.' So we can't sign him off for them.., they always say they can't do it til they've done it three times….*(P6:L1:M).

Megan discussed ensuring the child has completed an ELG three times before confirming that the child is secure in an area of learning. Other

participants were not so confident in suggesting a specific number of times a child demonstrated that they were confident in an area, before being assessed as secure. As a manager, Keyleigh stated that she expected her staff to have observed the child completing a task: "*at least five, six, seven times before they can actually say that 'yes they've met that'"* (P8:L1:K). The differences between the two settings demonstrated the differences in interpretation. Chloe suggested that a mixed approach to interpreting the EYFS is needed: "*maybe there's a call for some areas to be tick boxy and other areas down to discretion, interpretation*" (P9:L1:C). Keyleigh and Megan highlighted that there is no set guidance on what constituted a secure level of development.

Aleigha discussed the frustration at using the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) to identify speech, language and communication needs:

> *the bit that we use I don't think it goes into enough detail … some of the communication area there's maybe two or three points in each section 'can they do this this' and this but….. it's not broad enough* (P:15:L1:A).

Freya made a similar point: "*you get some that are talking loads and know loads of words, and then you get some that really don't know the words, but they are not actually behind compared to the EYFS*" (P2:L2:FR). Kailah also discussed the EYFS as a tool to assess language development: "*it's not very specific. It's very much 'can use two words together,' but a child might* [say] *'more please' might be the only two words that could string together"* (P4:L1:K).

Kailah, Freya and Aleigha all highlighted that all children develop at different rates. The original design of the EYFS (DfE, 2008b) as a framework allowed for flexibility and interpretation. However, as time has progressed, understanding how to use the tool appeared to have shifted from the original intention. The change could be due to a lack of understanding and training about how to use the EYFS. Poppy shared her disappointment that the teaching received by level 2 and 3 apprentices did not include the principles of using the EYFS. Poppy stated: "*she knew the fundamentals of it but not*

how to use it, it's not taught how to use it" (P12:L2:P). Poppy's point demonstrated how the variability in how to use the EYFS may have occurred, as each person can read and make a judgement on how to use and apply the documentation. Poppy's point suggested that courses do not cover how to use the EYFS as a tool for assessment and could explain the variations in how it is applied.

Participants also identified the use of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) to assess children who have English as an additional language [EAL] and children who may have a special educational need. Chloe expressed the view that the EYFS appeared to focus on children with normative development, and those children that did not develop within expected ranges were disadvantaged. Chloe stated: "*it's fine if you've got a child that's typical, as soon as you've got a child that's EAL or… if we've got a child with additional needs it doesn't really cater for them …it doesn't really correlate*" (P9:L1:C). Ayla worked in a setting where around 95 per cent of the children attending the setting were from families who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Ayla expressed the view that because the EYFS is assessed in English, many children who speak EAL are disadvantaged. Some children may be able to demonstrate understanding but in their home language. Ayla said:

> *because they are EAL the EYFS is not great it is not supporting, these children at all.…because they know much more, but I'm already putting them down...the child is underachieving, but he's not.* " (P13:L2:A).

Ayla's comment appeared to resonate with Armstrong's (1995) views on the government agenda to promote normalisation within developmental measures. Ayla and Chloe reflected that children might have a good level of understanding and competency in their primary language. The EYFS is, however, assessed in English and can provide an inaccurate picture of the child's capabilities and ability to achieve ELG's. Ayla expressed that in her view, the EYFS did not only disadvantaged children who spoke EAL but also children with additional needs:

> *The EYFS doesn't support any additional needs the same …autistic children …you know he is five but according to the EYFS he is like 8-*

> *20 because he can't put two words together, but you know he can run, he plays with small world or whatever, he loves being creative* **...** *but because this is what EYFS says, he is down there. I am so frustrated...oh god I'm getting mad* (P13:L2:A).

Children with SLCN are considered to have additional educational needs and therefore Ayla's comment is significant in highlighting the impact the assessment measures have on children's attainment levels. The broad design of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) can make it difficult for practitioners to show progress. The Pengreen Report (2018:4), funded by the DfE, highlighted that the EYFS is a **"**norm-referenced approach**"** to assessment that can lead to the focus on deficit's that does not accurately project what a child can do. The Rochford Review (Rochford, 2016) recommended that assessment strategies for children with specific learning needs should represent the success of children and therefore recommended the development of alternative evaluation methods.

5.5.5 **Whose Responsibility?**

Several of the participants discussed the ambiguity surrounding who had the overriding responsibility for completing assessments. There appeared to be differences across participants in how the documentation was used and maintained. Both Keyleigh and Mia discussed that their settings took the view that the responsibility for maintaining documentation was the responsibility of all practitioners rather than individual key workers. The differences between the participant responses to the approaches appeared to suggest that settings make individual decisions on assessment procedures. In some cases, the individual key worker was solely responsible for carrying out and collecting documentation, and in others documentation is the role of all practitioners. The finding is significant because practitioners can perceive children's development differently depending upon a variety of factors, and this might lead to an uneven or inaccurate child profile as highlighted by Cotzias and Whitehorn, (2013). However, the participants of the current study discussed that the number of key children they were responsible for could make collecting documentation challenging.

Ferne, Freya, and Evie discussed the number of key children for whom a practitioner is responsible. Freya and Evie discussed the challenges of supporting larger numbers of children. Evie stated: "*I had eighteen**….**and then the other lady left, and so I had 24**…** it was hard"* (P5:L1:E). Evie was discussing the challenges of larger key group sizes when trying to support specific children with SLCN that required more time. Evie identified that children with SLCN required additional support. However, time was not made available and therefore posed a challenge of identifying units of time to support the child that may not have been fully effective. This situation indicated that Evie acknowledged the responsibility of her role in supporting the child with specified interventions that were not possible to do effectively in the time available. Evie complied with the requirement but at a superficial level. Evie said she felt that she sometimes almost neglected the child because of her other obligations as a key worker to the other children in the setting, which required her inclusion in setting ratios. The situation could show that although the setting perceived intervention as necessary, compliance with statutory regulations can make it challenging to meet the individual child**'**s needs. The sustainability challenges detailed by Ceeda (2014) where there was a 17 per cent shortfall per hour, per child, between the cost to provide a childcare place and the funding provided by the government, could aid in understanding this finding. Sustainability issues appeared to impact on the settings ability to facilitate interventions.

5.5.6 **Participant understanding of language development**

The participants discussed their understanding of typical language development, and they all appeared to have a different interpretation. In six of the interviews, the conversation turned to the number of words that a child might say at two-years-old as a measure for typical language development (see Appendix R). The answers differed from ten words at two (Megan), 50 words (Kailah), to 200 hundred (Caurtney). The research highlighted the ambiguity in the number of words a child can say (see Rescorla & Alley, 2001; Bates et al. 1994). Rescorla and Ratner (1996) determined that as a

primary measure, two-year-old children should have a minimum vocabulary range of fifty words and some two-word combinations. However, Bates et al.'s research (1994) found that the vocabulary range of a two-year-old was between 57 to 534, with a median word range of 311. Evie stated: "*50 words isn't a lot, is it? Or is it a lot? I don't know…. That doesn't seem like a lot for a two-year-old*" (P5:L1:E). Mia said: "*I think 300 sounds like a good number if you said between two and two and a half, and you gave them a little bit of a bracket"* (P1:L1:M). Other participants made similar comments suggesting confusion over how many words a child knows as a measure of the expected level of development.

The participants appeared to rely on their previous experience to guide them in determining whether the child was developing normative speech and language patterns. They reflected that previous experience is key in guiding them; however, if practitioners do not have this experience, then children with atypical language development could be missed. Chloe stated:

> *there was a couple of children…the previous Sendco .. hadn't identified anything with them.. when I looked into it further spent time with them, there was really definite issues.* (P9:L1:C).

Chloe seemed to be suggesting that the previous SENDCo had little experience with recognising children with SLCN and therefore missed children with language needs. Mia explained that she had experienced higher numbers of children coming into the pre-school room that was not at the expected levels of development for communication and language. Mia reflected:

> *if the staff are not noticing and … not trained and they don't realise that they need to be noticing, it's not going to be picked up early enough and it's just like a massive rolling ball, it gets bigger and bigger and then it gets harder and harder to get them back on track* (P1:L1:M).

Kailah discussed the importance of experience in the absence of specific training:

> *..the first child I came across I …felt very much like I just didn't know what to do. As we said before, the training is not given for communication language in depth. So, .. you just don't know what to do"* (P4:L1:K).

Evie made a similar point and discussed that as an apprentice, she struggled to identify and support children who may have had SLCN:

> *Some of them I did when I was an apprentice, I wouldn't have even flagged up the fact that they had speech and language difficulties because they … ticked the boxes because they've ticked the boxes doesn't mean they're actually talking or they can communicate* (P5:L1:E).

Evie went on to say that through the experience of working with children, she was able to increase her skills: "*I think … the more experienced you are the better it is, the easier it is for you to identify*" *(P5:L1:E).* Megan and Chloe made similar points and stressed the importance of experience when working with children almost as a training aid to help identify future children that they might work with. However, without consistent and specific guidance on what normative language should look like, and the ambiguity of the primary assessment tool (see 0), children with SLCN could potentially be overlooked. Evie commented that as an apprentice, other staff members did not always have the time to support her or answer her questions due to the statutory ratio requirements that meant the setting worked up to capacity. Evie said:

> *you're just chucked into it, and it's like 'I don't know what I'm doing.'….. I did say 'I don't know whether I'm doing it right.'… they did say they would observe me if I wanted and I said yeah '… I'd rather you do that' but because it's a nursery there's never any time or anybody spare to watch you do it. .. there's always people poorly .. there's never a spare person* (P5:L1:E).

Evie's comment demonstrated that within a busy nursery, because of several factors, including government-stipulated ratios and funding, it is not always possible to provide support to inexperienced practitioners or for shared dialogue. This point appears to contradict the guidance that level 2 practitioners should be supervised by a level 3 practitioner at all times (DfE, 2017a). However, the guidance could also be seen as ambiguous in that it does not define what supervision should involve. Level 2 practitioners are

counted within adult: child ratios, as many settings require all adults to work hands-on within ratios to remain sustainable. Working to capacity can impact the time available to support staff and enable discussions to take place on the job when practitioners are working with the children. Caurtney worked in a maintained nursery school setting with different government funding formulas. Caurtney's setting allowed for a dual key person system where practitioners work in pairs and the children have two key people: "*we just have all of our children have two key workers. We work in a team*" (P7:L1:C). Caurtney discussed that this approach allowed for dialogue and acts as a support system for each other and the child. Poppy worked in a nursery chain and takes college students on placements. Poppy talked about only allowing practitioners to have key children when she, as a manager, is confident in their abilities.

Evie had been in practice for four years and was at the end of her level five foundation degree at the time of the interview. Evie stated that she would struggle to identify a child with an SLCN: "*confidently? No, I wouldn't….. I wouldn't have a clue ..I would do the same thing I would do … the assessments and stuff, and then I'd have to ask" (P5:L1:E).* Evie reflected on the value of having other experienced staff members to talk to as a resource strategy to help her when she was unsure of how to support children, however, this is dependent upon time as discussed previously. However, as Akhal, (2019), Ceeda, (2018) and Gaunt (2018b) highlighted, the early years sector was experiencing large staff turnover rates, which could impact on the resource that Evie appeared to value.

5.5.7 **Parents**

Participants discussed the importance of working with parents in the identification of SLCN. Building strong relationships with parents was considered an essential aspect of the work that the participants did to support children's development. Georgia discussed the importance of empathy when working with parents: "*it always helps if you can say 'I know where you're coming from, I'm a parent*" (P11:L2:G). Corrie also discussed the need to work empathetically with parents when broaching that their child might have an additional need. Corrie stated:

> *I always go down the road 'we need to make sure' 'we need to do everything' you know if we can get some help in, there's all sorts of ways around it, its just drip drip dripping it.* (P14:L2:C)

Aleigha and Corrie both shared that some parents have suspicions that their child might require additional support. Corrie shared an incident with a parent who thought her child might need additional support: **"***she'd [parent] said, 'I've been saying to the health visitor, not quite right there' and she said, and I said 'well I'm agreeing with you'"* (P14:L2:C) Aleigha shared a similar experience: "*I think she is aware that there was something not quite right, but she wasn't too sure*" *(P:15:L1:A).* Previous research has suggested that parental concern is a useful indicator in determining SLCN (Abbeduto & Boudreau, 2004), demonstrating the importance of parent setting relationships to provide opportunities for parents to share concerns.

Conversely, Caurtney's experience appeared to differ. Caurtney reflected that: "*most of the time, parents think their child is fine and its quite a shock, that we've got some concerns*" (P7:L1:C). Broomfield and Dodd (2004) stated that parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds do not always share concerns with practitioner's due to low expectations of language abilities.

Chloe suggested that as a new mother, it can be challenging to know when and if to be concerned. Chloe shared her experience of being a first-time parent:

> *I got given a book when I had him**.....** I read it from cover to cover. But actually, looking back on it now**...** that is the cruellest thing you can give any parent. It's telling you what they should be doing and what if they're not and then you think oh my god but also, if things aren't go[ing] right, you haven't got time to look at the bloody book* (P9:L1:C).

Chloe's story helped to provide insight into why some parents may perceive news that their child may require additional support as a shock, as discussed by Caurtney. Corrie discussed that many parents understand their child's attempts at communication, and this can make it more difficult for them to accept that their child may need additional support. Kailah shared her experience of working with parents who were not concerned about their child's SLD and therefore refused to give consent to follow-up practitioners' concerns. Kailah shared that a parent she had worked with stated: "*he doesn't* [need support] *its nothing he's speaking fine he speaks more than his little brother*" (P4:L1:K). A range of factors can influence parents' understanding of child development, however, previous children or comparisons with other children of a similar age are discussed by Prelock et al. (2008). As parents can often spend the most amount of time with their children, they can often understand their child's language when it is not always clear to others and explains why some parents to not share the same concerns as practitioners.

5.5.8 **Summary**

This section highlighted the participants professional role and the expectation placed upon them by themselves, colleagues, managers, local and national government agencies. The section identified the participant's motivation, experiences and challenges of engaging (CPD) and how those experiences supported their understanding of assessment. The section concluded that CPD depended upon the motivation of the participants to source, organise and fund CPD opportunities.

The chapter identified expectations placed on participants to generate data using tools that they were not always comfortable using, and the challenges

that this caused in the assessment and identification of SLCN of the children with whom they worked. Throughout the chapter so far, the participants expressed their frustration and at times seemed to be disillusioned, but they also appeared to conform to the guidance and requests through local and national government bodies, even when there was no legal requirement to do so, demonstrating compliance. The following sections of the chapter explore the prioritisation, organisation and deployment of the support resources that were available to the participants.

5.6 Prioritisation, Organisation and Deployment of resources

The following sections explore the prioritisation, organisation and deployment of support resources. The next part of the section is divided into the external support that is available to the participants for supporting SLCN in children through the Local Health Authority and the Local Education Authority (LA). Participants may have access to health visitors and speech and language therapy services (SLT) through the Local Health Authority. The section explores the participant's experiences of engaging with these external services and how the support from these services is prioritised, organised and deployed within the two geographical areas.

The section also explores prioritisation, organisation and deployment of resources through the LA by examining the shared experiences of the participants within the current study. The participant's experiences are compared to explore the differences and similarities of support from alternative LA perspectives.

The section concludes with an exploration of the internal setting support that the participants provide to the children. The strategies that participants use to support children, are discussed with an exploration of how the training that participants and their colleagues receive is disseminated, and how parents can either help or hinder the support that children receive in the settings.

5.6.1 **External support through the Local Health Authority**

The following sections explore the participant's experiences of engaging with the local health authority agencies for children with identified SLCN starting with health visitors and then moving on to SLT services. Participant's discussed their experiences of accessing support from these two services and express the support they received in differing ways depending upon the geographical area.

5.6.2 **Health Visitors**

Aleigha and Evie discussed the health visitor as a referral avenue for speech and language therapy (SLT) services. However, parents needed to contact the health visitor to support the referral in this case. Research supported the role of the health visitor in securing support for children with SLCN. Historically health visitors made the most amount of referrals to SLT (Enderby & Petheram, 2000), the most recent figures available showed that fifty per cent of SLT referrals came from health visitors (Broomfield & Dodd, 2011). However, the participants discussed their frustration at trying to engage with the health visitors. Caurtney discussed that the settings attempt to contact the health visitor could be frustrating:

> *I've tried the health visitors …… they never ring back or 'I don't have that child anymore on my books' that's quite a common one, even with a two-year check, I find that really hard work, I know we're supposed to be working with them, but it doesn't work in practice* (P7:L1:C).

Ferne and Chloe also discussed the integrated two-year-review that should be completed by the early years setting and the health visitor. As discussed in section 3.3.3, the Integrated Review at Age Two was introduced in 2015 merging the 'Progress Check at Age Two and the Healthy Child Programme' (Nicholson & Palaiologou, 2016: 3; DfE, 2015). The Review was designed to help identify strengths and weaknesses in the three primary areas of development (Tickell, 2011). Communication and language as a prime area

form part of this Review and therefore, could help to highlight concerns from a practitioner and health visitor perspective.

Ferne and Chloe discussed the delay in health visitors completing their part of the Review. Ferne discussed completing the setting's side of the Integrated Review at two-years-old as mandated by the Statutory guidance (DfE, 2017a). However, Ferne appeared to suggest that the assessment is left for some time before the health visitor completes their side of the assessment, causing the setting to complete a new form. Ferne stated: "*if the parent tell us that they're having the two year check in two weeks we will get the old one and the fresh one ready for them to give to the health visitor*" (P3:L2:FE). Chloe made a similar observation suggesting that delays in the health visitor completing their side of the Review is a common occurrence across both locations involved in this study. Chloe stated that sometimes, the child could be nearly three-years-old before the health visitor completed the Review: "*it's you know it's due… severe lack of resources. But this is impacting on children's development*" (P9:L1:C). Chloe appeared to sympathise with the health visitor workload and accepted that delays were understandable; however, stated that this ultimately impacted on children's development. The impact on children could be because of the knock-on effect that a hold-up in one support service that can lead to prolonged delays in children receiving the support that they need.

5.6.3 **Speech and language therapy services**

The following section identifies the experiences of participants of the SLT referral processes and waiting times in both locations. The section explores the suggested support strategies offered by the SLT teams in both locations. The differences in SLT approaches between the locations are discussed. The section explores training that is offered in L2 by SLT and the SLT sheets

5.6.4 **Process of referrals to speech and language therapy services**

The process of referrals to SLT services appeared to differ in the two different locations. Within L1, participants suggested that SLT would not accept referrals until the child is a minimum of three-years-old. Evie stated: "*they don't work with children unless their three*" (P5:L1:E). Mia made a similar comment that SLT would not accept a referral from the child until the child was three, Mia stated: "*when he was three speech and language decided to then access him, and he was really far behind"* (P1:L1:M). Caurtney, Megan, Chloe, Keyleigh and Aleigha, all made similar comments. Their understanding was that SLT services would not accept a referral for a child within their county before the child is three-years-old unless there are additional factors, such as an additional need to the SLCN. Aleigha offered her thoughts on why this policy might have been created and appeared to refer to the watchful waiting approach discussed in section 0. Aleigha stated: "*what we tend to get advised is, well they could just be a bit of a slow starter, let's give them some time and see if they catch up*" *(P:15:L1:A).* Similarly, Chloe stated:

> *For my eldest son, they said, 'oh we'll do an assessment over the phone with you'. So, they rang me and asked me my 'views' on his speech and said 'All right we'll review in six months'* (P9:L1:C).

Nelson et al. (2006) highlighted that this was a strategy to see if the child recovered without intervention. The cautious waiting strategy in a time of austerity and limited resources can be viewed as serving two purposes, allowing the child time to develop language skills while saving money for children who require support. As discussed in section 3.7.4, cuts to public spending have impacted on the provision offered by SLT services (Bercow, 2008; RCSLT, 2014 & 2017). However, Everitt (2013) argued that the watchful waiting approach is risky because there is no way of knowing which children are likely to develop typically from those who are not, compacting the issue.

Caurtney, who worked in a maintained nursery school setting suggested that there were specific times of the year that she was able to place a referral to SLT services: "*I can only refer to speech therapist three times a year of a two-week window at beginning of each school term*" (P7:L1:C). Caurtney's experience may be different from other participants as they all worked within the PVI sector and could, therefore, have different referral processes. Caurtney suggested that the changes were relatively new and a couple of years ago, she would have been able to refer at any time. Caurtney also spoke of SLT services providing an initial assessment of the child's needs, over a telephone conversation with the child. Caurtney admitted that parents had told her: *"they ask to speak to the child over the phone" (P7:L1:C).* Caurtney's comment could indicate, as highlighted by Hall (2005), that the SLT services in her area are attempting to prioritise the level of need by attempting to assess the child cost-effectively. Parveen (2019) highlighted that although funding to the High Needs Block had risen by eight per cent, the demand for services had risen by 39 per cent, creating a need to prioritise the available services.

Conversely in L2, the referral process appeared to be going through changes at the time the interviews took place. Some of the participants appeared to be aware of the changes, and others did not mention any changes. The differences could be attributed to when the participants had last attempted to make a referral. Initially, within L2, participants were able to refer children to SLT from two-years-old. Georgia, Ferne and Ruby all discussed referring children to SLT services from two-years-old, however, as Georgia pointed out: "*well you could put it in at two, but they wouldn't be seen til three maybe longer*" (P11:L2:G). Georgia's comment suggested that an accepted referral did not necessarily mean that a child would receive support any earlier than those children from L1. Poppy provided more insight into how the referral process had changed in the months shortly before the interview took place. Poppy stated that a referral checklist sheet had to be completed for each age group. The sheet contained a list of speech and language-related competencies. Poppy explained:

> *if they don't meet the full requirements of the tick list, you can't put the referral through ..you have to wait til their three because by the time they get to the three year old they are not meeting a lot of them targets. So, you know it is quite frustrating at the minute because you can't refer as early as you used to be able to* (P12:L2:P).

Although there is the potential to make a referral from two-years-old, it is unlikely to be successful due to the strict referral criteria for the age group. The finding indicated that L1 and 2 are similar in the ages that children will receive support and suggested that this may be later in the child's life rather than earlier. Poppy stated: "*they could be lucky to get seen before they go to school from us"* (P12:L2:P) suggesting that children are more likely to begin formal schooling without the professional support from SLT services. Morton (2013) highlighted that waiting times for SLT support could mean that some children might have transitioned into school before a referral is accepted. The finding could suggest why some children are starting school without the communication skills to access the curriculum (Law et al. 2017).

5.6.5 **Waiting times**

Participants from both locations discussed the waiting times for an initial SLT assessment for an accepted referral. The waiting times at both locations were similar and roughly six months to a year after the initial acceptance of the referral. The finding appeared to suggest that if the referral is not accepted until the child is three, SLT may see the child at around the age of four, confirming the comment made by Poppy above. Poppy expressed her frustration about the new SLT referral process: "*I think it's ludicrous because the whole point of the two-year-old funding was to highlight these issues earlier, to improve statistics moving forward*" (P12:L2:P). Poppy's comment hinted at early intervention that has been the focus of policy documents (Bercow, 2008; Allen, 2011; Tickell, 2011; Bercow, 2018), that emphasised the long-term benefits of early intervention. Poppy also referenced *"improving statistics*" showing a data-driven purpose for supporting children to be at the expected level of development (discussed in section 2.8). Poppy went on to

say that the new system is creating a backlog because of the volume of referrals:

> *that many referrals being put forward that they can't cope with the workload, but then you put a referral in now you are waiting up to a year .. to get it assessed …and to get your initial appointment (P12:L2:P).*

Participant's from L1 suggested at times SLT services indicated that they did not need to see the child. Kailah shared that a child had struggled to communicate for a year because SLT said: "*they didn't need to see him*" (P4:L1:K). Kailah expressed that she felt there was an expectation for the setting to support the child: "*it's almost like …they've passed the buck 'its ok cos nurseries can deal with that when schools can't*'" (P4:L1:K). Kailah's comment appeared to relate to SLT accepting referrals more readily from school-aged children. Kailah appeared to have attributed the reason for this as SLT perception that nurseries are more able to support behaviour than schools are.

Caurtney shared that parents had told her that SLT also refused referrals from children who had a dummy. Caurtney's comment could relate to the prioritisation of services for those children who have a higher level of need. In the examples provided, the participants expressed their frustration. They both appeared to feel that as practitioners, they required professional help to support the child; however, because of the processes within SLT, there was no support available.

5.6.6 **Speech and language therapy services support strategies**

Section 3.7.4 discussed the transition from clinic-based approaches to working within the community in environments specific to the individual child. The following section explores the participants experiences of SLT support strategies that they were offered in both locations.

The experiences of the participants of SLT visits to the setting varied across locations and individual participants. Megan, Aleigha and Keyleigh all

discussed that they had never experienced SLT visits to the setting. Keyleigh stated: "*I've worked there for three years, but actually in all of the other settings that I've worked in, I've never seen anyone from speech and language*" (P8:L1:K). Mia suggested that she had experienced SLT visits, but it was rare, and the setting had to fight for the visit. Mia expressed her frustration:

> *whether they are under cuts … budgets and everything but they always say that they've got a lot on but…we have a lot on….I think it needs to come down to the children who need them really…(*P1:L1:M).

Kailah and Mia discussed that when they had experienced SLT visits, the therapist took the child away from the leading group and the key person, or observed the child within the setting. Mia and Keyleigh reflected that they would have found it useful to have observed the strategies SLT services modelled so that they could be repeated within the setting and reduce the need for further SLT visits. Mia stated: "*I would love to sit in and see what they're doing*" (P1:L1:M). Keyleigh suggested that SLT training might be a solution to reducing the strain on services:

> *if speech and language were to actually come in and give us some proper training, I think it would probably alleviate them a little bit ….it would probably stop their waiting list because we'd be able to do the early interventions and it might even stop being referred when they do get to three*. (P8:L1:K).

Conversely, Poppy, Ruby, Ferne, and Corrie from L2 discussed working positively with SLT services. These participants addressed taking part in the therapy sessions that took place within the setting and also considered the approaches provided by SLT useful in assisting the children in their care. Corrie discussed receiving blocks of therapy for the child that took place: "*once a week for six weeks, …they watch us working with them, they give us some suggestions some ideas*" (P14:L2:C). The experiences of the participants from L2 appeared to show a collaborative working relationship with SLT services. However, the participants reflected on past experiences before the referral system changes and could no longer be an indicator of the current situation. As Poppy had discussed, the current process might delay

SLT support until after the children have started school. If SLT services do not see the children until they are in school, the support that practitioners have previously valued may no longer be available. The finding also suggested that the numbers of children starting school without the communication skills to access the curriculum could increase in L2.

5.6.7 Training provided by speech and language therapy services.

Ferne, Ruby and Poppy all discussed training the SLT team provided. Ferne and Poppy discussed training that was organised and funded by the SLT for the child, the family and the setting to help provide a coordinated approach to supporting the child's needs. Ferne stated:

> *they [SLT] … talked about training … they put mum and dad on as well as me together to .. like work together .. get to know the parents.. what they do at home, what I do and the training itself like for us to do the same thing at home like support the child a bit more* (P3:L2:FE).

Poppy confirmed:

> *for him, they [SLT] invited us to do specific training with his grandparents, who were his carers.. so we can help him. It was like in a group thing, so I was with her as her practitioner, and there were other groups of people with their practitioners* (P12:L2:P).

The examples above highlighted the strategies that were demonstrated by SLT could be mirrored across the home and setting providing a more consistent and uniformed approach, that both participants appeared to appreciate. Training through SLT services aided in developing the participant's skills and appeared to increase their confidence.

5.6.8 Speech and language therapy services support sheets

All the participants from L1, with one exception, talked about receiving a worksheet from SLT services. The participants shared that the sheets were generic and provided to all referred children. The participants discussed their frustration that regardless of the reason for the referral; the child received the same sheet. Caurtney stated: "*the letters look the same; I think they just*

change the name and address on most of them, to be honest" (P7:L1:C). Keyleigh made a similar comment: "*nearly every child gets exactly the same piece of paper with exactly the same activities on*" (P8:L1:K). Some of the participants discussed the generic sheets as a potential reason that they would be reluctant to refer to SLT because they already have access to the sheet and referrals can take time for sometimes small gains to the child. SLT worksheets were also referred to by the participants from L2. However, the sheets were provided in collaboration with therapy and modelled by the SLT to the participants. Ferne shared her experience:

> *they model what they want you to do, they provide you with sheets, they provide the setting with the report of, anything [we] have discussed and targets which we could do to help support the child* (P3:L2:FE).

The worksheets in this case appeared to act as support prompts to aid recollection when working with the children. Ruby stated she found the sheets helpful following the therapy session: "*to practice that at home*" (P10:L2:R). However, Poppy reflected that since the changes to the referral process, the SLT worksheets are used in a similar way to L1:

> *they'll send it out, and it is pretty much is a pre-printed sheet for every child. And they'll just highlight the ones that are specific to them, and then you go on their website and get the ones that you need, so if child a and child b have got the same needs, they would get the same fact sheet not like tailored just to them* (P12:L2:P).

Poppy's remark seemed to show that the programmes are seeking to be more cost effective and move away from face-to-face care towards a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting children because of funding cuts across services. This appeared to indicate a movement towards prioritisation, as suggested by Parveen (2019) and Hall (2005).

5.6.9 **Summary of the section**

The previous sections identified the experiences of participants of the support that they experienced from the local health authority concerning children's SLCN. The section explored the challenges of contacting health visitors experienced by participants from both locations and concluded that factors including cuts to health funding has increased workloads and made it challenging for practitioners to seek support from health visitors. The section also explored the differences and similarities in SLT referral processes and concluded that waiting times in both locations appeared to be moving towards similar referral processes. Due to the referral processes, children had often left the setting to begin formal schooling before support could be arranged. The section also explored the support strategies that offered by the SLT teams and emphasised the apparent differences in engagement styles between the locations. The section concluded that the SLT training offered in L2 was useful in supporting practitioners understanding of support services. The use of generic sheets that are sent out to settings in both locations by SLT services were not always considered helpful by participants particularly in L1. The following section explores the participant's experiences of the support that they could access from the local authority.

5.7 Local authority 1 support

Participants from both locations discussed the support available to them from their local authority. Based on discussions with the participants, support in L1 appeared to come from an LA-based early years team that provided fully qualified teachers and were known as specialist early years teachers (SEYT). There also appeared to be generalised support from early years support coordinators (EYC) also provided by the LA; however, they were mentioned less frequently by participants and referred to by the team name. For anonymity, the team is referred to as the local early years team (LEYT). Participants shared that when they required support, they would call the LEYT and either an EYC or an SEYT would visit the setting, depending upon the area of need.

Participants from L1 discussed access to the SEYT that they were able to contact for advice if they were concerned about a child. Chloe, Aleigha, Kailah and Keyleigh all discussed gaining advice from the SEYT. The participants discussed that they could either request a visit from the SEYT to observe a child that they were concerned about or telephone for advice. Keyleigh stated that although the SEYT works part-time, she was swift to respond to concerns that Keyleigh raised: "*I know if I phoned her on a Wednesday morning for help, she would be there on a Wednesday afternoon*" (P8:L1:K). Keyleigh went on to say that although she found the SEYT helpful, and valued the support, the SEYT does not have specific speech and language training: "it's *not just speech and language, and she only gives advice from her knowledge as well, obviously she's not [got] that specialism so…*"(P8:L1:K). Keyleigh appeared to be saying that without specialist advice, the support was not always as effective as it would be from an SLT, who had the specialist language knowledge and expertise to support the child. Kailah discussed contacting the LEYT for support and they would either visit or provide support over the telephone: "*I would go to [LEYT], and they'd say… 'have you looked at those and have you assessed against that'" (P4:L1:K).* Kailah went on to say that she had asked the LEYT to help a child she was struggling to support. The setting had exhausted all of the strategies they had to support the child:

> *they came in and observed and helped us to ...establish what… where we should go next….. we didn't know what to do and were very helpful with kind of pointing in the right direction as to where to go* (P4:L1:K).

Chloe discussed the strategies that were suggested by the LEYT to support a child in her setting. Chloe felt the strategies were useful and provided her with an alternative speech and language assessment method. Chloe stated that through the LEYT, she was able to access and apply for the Wellcomm Toolkit: "*if you've got a child, you can apply for funding to get it or the specialist early years team are authorised to do the assessment"* (P9:L1:C). The Wellcomm Toolkit was discussed in section 3.5.3. Chloe was fortunate that the LEYT had purchased the Toolkit enabling Chloe to do the

assessment. The finding suggested that without support from the LEYT, Chloe would have had to rely solely on the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) to assess the child.

Caurtney and Megan both stated that they did not receive support from LEYT. Caurtney said: "*they [LA] won't come to us … because we're a school, they don't give us any support"* (P7:L1:C). As discussed in section 3.7.3, funding allocations differ in each local authority and is controlled firstly at the national government level and then at the local authority level (DfE, 2018b). Funding is allocated to different blocks, and it could be that as Caurtney worked in a maintained nursery setting, the funding for her setting comes from the schools block rather than the early years block. Therefore, maintained nursery schools fall within the remit of school funding formulas and may not be eligible for support from the local authority special teacher services that fall into the early years block. Also, Caurtney discussed that her setting employs several qualified teachers, and therefore, it could be assumed that these teachers would offer the advice and support needed. Caurtney stated that she thought the lack of support from the LEYT was because of government cutbacks rather than the organisation of resources between the local authority funding pots (see 3.7.3). Caurtney said: "*you can't get extra support from them. They've [LEYT] streamlined that much … the last few years, they've made redundancies, staff have gone and not been reemployed"* (P7:L1:C). Caurtney's comments suggested that her setting received support in the past, therefore suggesting a change in the allocation of funds.

Aleigha had received support from SEYT; however, did not feel that the suggested strategies were always helpful and felt that her professional judgement was not always fully considered by the SEYT. Aleigha appeared to express frustration at the process where the SEYT spends half an hour with a child and suggested *"blanket strategies*" that Aleigha expressed to the teacher that she knows will not work: "*sometimes some of the things she suggest immediately I know, will not work*" *(P:15:L1:A).* Aleigha went on to say she felt she must try the suggested strategies; however, perceived it: "*is*

a waste of time." However, because the setting does not see the SEYT that often, it can be some time before the setting receives another visit. Aleigha appeared to be suggesting that sometimes, the support provided by the SEYT can delay the child's progress if the strategies suggested are not appropriate for the individual child.

5.7.1 **Local authority 2 support**

The local authority in L2 had an early years team (LEYT) organised into two sections. One section of the team offered general support by early years coordinators (EYC). The other side is more specialised support for children with specific educational needs and are known as SEN coordinators (SENC). There are qualified teachers within the team that support settings who offer funded education places to children aged three to five years old, to support the practitioners in a similar way to a school-based setting. The participants from L2 did not refer to the qualified teachers, as the focus of the interview was two-year-old children.

Six of the seven participants from L2 discussed the support that they were able to access from the local authority. The team offers early years professionals the opportunity to access support and advice for practitioners how may have concerns about a child's development. Ayla, Ferne, Corrie and Ruby all talked positively about their experiences of accessing advice from the SENC. Ayla and Ruby discussed contacting the SENC for advice and talked about one of the SENC's visiting the setting to confirm their concerns. Ferne discussed her experiences of the SENC and stated:

> *They come in and show us how we do each target to make sure that we do it correctly to help support the child, they also observe us help support the child, by watching us do the activities one to one. They give us feedback on how we've done it and then and if … we've done that target they show us a different way we could do that target to help support the child a bit more* (P3:L2:FE).

Ferne's comment appeared to suggest that support from the SENC in L2 is an iterative process, through advice, suggested modelled strategies,

observation and feedback. Ferne appeared to value the process as an aid to developing her skills. In this respect, it appeared that the support offered by EYC's and SENC's forms part of CPD for the practitioners within the area. Ruby and Corrie both reflected that access to support from SENC had increased recently. Previously, the team had been reduced to one person because of the funding cuts; however, the team had recently grown. The growth of the team led to an increase in the support that was on offer to settings. Corrie stated:

> *We get funding for children if they are on an Education and Health Care Plan. The area SENDCo comes in …. termly, and they're recent aren't they because a few years back there was only one person in the SEN department and you can really see the difference now.* (P14:L2:C).

Corrie's comment reflected that despite the cuts in other areas of the sector, the early years team within L2 has increased the number of staff employed to support the early years practitioners within the area. The finding suggested a commitment from the LA to supporting the early years sector through investment into the early years support services. As highlighted in section 3.7.3, LA spending is influenced by the local government and the needs of the area that the authority is responsible for (DfE, 2018b). The LA for L2 is in a majority Labour-controlled area, and L1 is in a majority-controlled Conservative area, possibly explaining some of the differences in the responses by participants in each location. The LA's primary role of the appointed DCS and LMCS is to ensure that the services within their local authority "address the needs of all children and young people" (DfE, 2013b: 5), and ensure that budgets and funding are managed effectively to support children's "health, social care and education" (DfE, 2013b: 9). Therefore, political influences and ideologies control the funding allocation to services within each LA.

Poppy discussed the relationships that had developed through working with the SENC. It appeared through conversations that a specific SENC is assigned to specific settings that aided in building relationships. This approach appeared to be valued by the participants in the current study.

Poppy shared that the SENC regularly visited the setting and was on hand to support practical aspects of the job, such as completing paperwork. Poppy shared that her SENC helped with referrals to outside agencies and helped to review the Education and Health Care Plan [EHCP] applications to reduce referral returns due to insufficient or incorrectly worded information. Poppy stated:

> *I had .. an EHCP to write, which was er a lot of paperwork **…**I was doing a section and emailing it to [***], and she was emailing it back with any tips.. 'have you thought about how he does this? Have you thought about how he does that? So that when it goes through its not going to get sent back and same with referrals* (P12:L2:P).

Poppy also discussed valuing the opportunity for a SENC to observe a child:

> *which is great because they'll see it differently they see it say in and day out, whereas as much as I've done the training and I've had quite a few children that have had SEN needs, I'm no way an expert and I would never say that I was whereas they are because they've been doing it a long time, so they'll come and help me with things like that as well* (P12:L2:P).

The comment from Poppy relating to exploring concerns from alternative perspectives from someone who has the broader experience of supporting children suggested that the participants valued the role of the LEYT. Ayla and Corrie also discussed the training available through the LEYT. In Ayla's example, the LEYT arranged bespoke training for the setting to occur after the setting had closed for the evening to enable more practitioners to attend. The example suggested that the local authority are committed to working flexibly and collaboratively with practitioners to support the needs of the children.

The LEYT's contribution in L2 appeared to be reflected in the courses and training available to the participants. The training discussed by participants from L2 appeared to suggest that CPD was supported and encouraged at local authority level, through planning, funding and sourcing training opportunities for the practitioners within the area. Ayla emphasised this point by discussing training the LEYT organised to support practitioner's

understanding of language development for children with English as an additional language. The training took place after hours in the setting. Ayla stated: "*we've got one [a training session] a week on Tuesday about communication. Early years [LEYT] are coming to us to do that [the communication training for EAL] …coming to us after work"* (P13:L2:A). According to Ayla's experience, the local authority in L2 appeared to be attentive to both the children's needs and the training needs of the early years professionals, providing customised workshops to address any training need gaps. Although the finding could also suggest that the LEYT in L2 is proactively encouraging training and support to ensure the maintenance of developmental norms. It could be proposed that the LEYT in L1 is trusted to maintain independent normative rates without increased support.

5.7.2 **Funding to support children**

Additional funding can be applied for by early years settings, through their LA to support children within the setting. Often the funding is used by settings to enhance the adult: child ratios to enable practitioners to work with children on a one-to-one basis for pockets of time within the times the child attends. However, to access the funding, settings must collate evidence through the SENDCoP 'Assess, plan, do, review' process (DfE, 2015).

Local authorities can set criteria for how much and what evidence they require, although it is not guaranteed (DfE, 2018b). The challenges of gaining funding were highlighted by Aleigha who stated that due to the criteria from her LA, it was unlikely the child would receive funding until the term before they were due to go up to full-time school. Aleigha stated: "*it is really frustrating …problems were flagged up ages* [ago]*…. we've just got funding now and he's been there for nearly two years and goes to school in September*" (P:15:L1:A). The delayed response to intervention means that the setting has just three months of funding to help make a difference in the child's development.

Poppy and Ayla both commented that they relied upon funding to provide more intensive support to children as they were unable to do so without the funding from the LA. Ayla commented that ultimately the setting managers ran the nursery as a business and therefore without government funding, only provided the statutory levels of care and education. Ayla said:

> *the directors will not pay for it because if we don't get the funding and then he will have to fund a member of staff it cost him, and they are a private nursery, it is business …that's just the way it is* (P13:L2:A).

Early years settings are challenged across the sector to remain sustainable for several reasons (see 2.4.3). Although participants appeared to want to provide more intensive interventions, they felt unable to do so within the current climate. Even when funding has been secured, it is not always enough to provide the support needed. Aleigha pointed out: *"£1.50 an hour for his 15 hours that he's there …I just don't know what we are supposed to do with £1.50 an hour to help him*" (P:15:L1:A). The £1.50 that Aleigha discussed does not cover the cost of the resources it would take to support a child. Under the government's current living wage rates, the funding would cover one practitioner to work with the child for less than three hours per the week the child is in the setting. That would not include the cost of any resources the setting might need to purchase.

The amount of funding each setting receives from the approved funding application depends on several factors and is determined by each LA. Factors included the perceived extent of the additional need, and whether the child has an EHCP and if so at what level. As discussed in section 3.7.3, the funding to support children with additional learning needs comes from the High Needs Block, but this funding is not ringfenced. Therefore, the funds can be moved to other Blocks. The level of severity is measured differently in each local authority and can, therefore, make comparisons across local authorities difficult. However, Parveen (2019) highlighted that the number of children with identified additional needs has risen above the increased rate of funding. The situation means that demands for funding are higher than the budgets allocated.

5.8 Internal support

The first section of the findings chapter explored who the participants are in relation to their professional role. The second section explored how children's development is assessed within early years settings, how SLCN are identified and the challenges associated with the assessment and identification of SLCN. This following section discusses the experiences of the participants in supporting children who have been identified with a SLCN. The section is split into two main foci; the external support that is available that participants can link into and the internal support structures that are in place to support children.

5.8.1 Strategies

The support strategies implemented by the setting and the individual participants were a central theme in the conversations. The support varied across settings. Two settings purchased services subsidised by the pupil premium funding to support the SLD of the children. Other settings discussed strategies that they had adapted themselves because of the recognition that the children required support in a time of cuts to external services and provision. Two of the participants discussed the services they had purchased to help support the children within the setting. Poppy discussed a drama group that she used that created ad hoc stories with the children to encourage not only speech and language but also social skills:

> *It's all retelling it in sort of expression and [that] the children don't communicate well can join in …the amount that they've come on just in that short session, once a week is unreal just from the confidence and joining in* (P12:L2:P).

Caurtney's setting also bought in a service that focused on singing as an approach to develop speech and language skills:

> *we pay this lady to come once a week she comes to do singing with the children because**....** the research has shown that children who sing regularly learn to talk quicker, and also it opens the pathways in the brain for later literacy and maths* (P7:L1:C).

Poppy was the manager of a nursery that forms part of a chain of nurseries, and Caurtney's setting is a maintained nursery. Therefore, they may have had more flexibility with spending than other smaller settings. However, the statements of these two participants demonstrated the potential of externally purchased support packages in supporting children's speech, language and communication development.

Caurtney referred to a language support strategy used by her setting called Elklan. Caurtney reflected that although she had not received Elklan training, she was guided by colleagues who had: "*…. the teachers…say, 'don't give them strings of sentences give them simple instructions and simple words because it's easier for them to pick up"* (P7:L1:C). The use of the Every Child a Talker system was discussed by two L2 participants who used resources regularly to support children in their practice. The most widely used tool discussed by participants (four out of eight) to assist speech and language evaluation after the EYFS was the First Call book and used only in L1. The First Call book appeared to have been created by the local authority and is not available to download or purchase. Megan explained that the First Call book is a language checklist that is used by both the setting and the home to create a more detailed overview of the child's language ability, Megan stated: "*we ask parents to take it home, fill it out and then we'll pair it up to see if it matches so the parent can see if a child is behind*" *(P6:L1:M)*. Kailah explained further that the First Call book also included information on oral development:

> *.. wasn't just speech related it was ….anything to [do with] mouths so whether they still had a bottle, whether they had a dummy comforter whether they, chewed food erm and or things like that as well as then looking at the sounds they make* (P4:L1:K).

The tool appeared to work on a checklist basis of the words and skills that children develop at typical ages. Chloe and Keyleigh also discussed using

the First Call book and discussed the support strategies it contained for speech, language and communication development. These participants spoke about the First Call book generally and did not provide further detail on what the strategies involved, however, stated that they found it useful.

Both locations appeared to have access to Makaton training. Caurtney worked in a maintained nursery school and discussed throughout the interview that Makaton training was an integral part of staff training days, with new staff trained as they came to work within the setting. Chloe and Aleigha talked about using Makaton but did not discuss attending specific training for it. The use of Makaton without training could indicate, like Chloe, who was shown some Makaton signs by SLT services, picked up the skills through working with other practitioners or external support services who were Makaton trained. Makaton can be used with all children to support language and can help children to communicate. Caurtney and Ferne suggested that the approach is helping when working with non-verbal children; moreover, Aleigha highlighted the use of visuals within the Makaton approach can help aid communication.

The most consistently used support strategy across all participants were group-based approaches to support children's speech and language. Mia and Megan both worked in the same setting and explained that their manager had created a bespoke group called **"**talk time**"** to support any children who were identified by practitioners within the setting as requiring additional support. The group enabled the setting to approach interventions more effectively by supporting multiple children at one time:

> *the deputy manager has started doing her own sessions, she's taken a few things from what mum told her, and a few things from the paperwork and the games and now does a talk time session every day*

Corrie, Ferne, Keyleigh, Kailah and Evie also discussed group-based approaches to intervention, through circle time activities, where children had the opportunity to communicate with the other children in their setting, with a

practitioner available to model vocabulary and communicative exchanges. Keyleigh explained: "we've *worked on social skills and done small group work ..eventually working up to bigger group work where she feels more confident to talk in front of people*" (P8:L1:K). Kailah discussed smaller group activities to help support the child: "*smaller group times with a child focussing ..on language activities"* (P4:L1:K). The group approach allows settings to support multiple children with similar needs while retaining the appropriate adult: child ratios, however, group-based approaches can also pose other obstacles, such as time for regular group activity, as Mia highlighted:

> *we have a specific room upstairs, so she has to then take two members of staff out to keep the ratio… if there's ever anybody off that gets cancelled, if there's ever a meeting, that gets cancelled* (P1:L1:M).

The participants reflected that where possible and appropriate, they preferred to work with the children in a targeted way, with one to one support. Participants can apply for funding from the LA to aid enhanced ratios to allow for one-to-one support (see 5.7). Nonetheless, due to the sector's sustainability challenges, Evie stressed that even if a child received funding, it did not always go to the child. Evie explained that the additional funding was absorbed by the setting to support all children because the setting could not release one practitioner on the funding that was received by the government:

> *he got funding …, we had a spare person that could have taken him off but because the room was so busy like you just couldn't. He still got his time and stuff, but .. we were still in the room, we were … surrounded by everybody else and people joining in rather than 'we'll take you away or will take you outside and do it.' But he didn't always get that. You had to use that third person to help out with everything else rather than give him his time* (P5:L1:E).

Evie pointed out that although the child received time, it was often snatched moments and not consistently approached, which could impact on the effectiveness of the intervention strategy. Freya and Evie discussed the challenges of supporting larger numbers of children and the impact this can

have on carrying out intervention support. Evie stated: "*I had eighteen….and then the other lady left, and so I had 24… it was hard"* (P5:L1:E). Evie complied with the requirement to provide the support; however, it appeared to be at a superficial level. Evie stated that she felt that she was almost neglecting the child because of her other commitments as a key worker to the other children within the setting, that required her to be included in setting ratios. The situation could show that although the setting perceives intervention as necessary, compliance with statutory regulations can make it challenging to meet the individual child's needs. The finding suggested that the sector sustainability challenges where Ceeda (2014) highlighted there is a 17 per cent shortfall per hour, per child, between the cost to provide a childcare place and the funding provided by the government, is impacting on the settings ability to facilitate interventions.

Participants used a range of other strategies (see Appendix S). There did not appear to be consistency in the intervention strategies used across participants or across participants within the same region. The range of strategies could reflect the different levels of qualifications, training and experiences of the participants and also highlighted the differences of support that children could receive. Participants appear to make use of the resources available to them in supporting children.

5.8.2 **Dissemination of training**

A solution to the limited resources and access to training discussed in previous sections, appeared to be the expectation for practitioners to disseminate any training that they have attended to colleagues. Kailah highlighted that this was an approach used by a previous setting she had worked at, however, discussed that this approach could also be challenging: *"as much as one person could go on the Elklan course they can't relay all that information and teach it to everybody else in the setting*" (P4:L1:K). Kailah identified that dissemination is not as useful as attending the training and hearing the information first-hand. Ayla made a similar point

and discussed her frustration when information relating to training was not passed on by colleagues:

> *… lots of people will not ..feedback back either. I went to… [training]…. and then I'm feeding back to preschool to my girls … "look at this its amazing" and one of the girls said 'I've done this training I've got all this stuff I did it a month ago'* (P13:L2:A).

Ayla made the point that collaboration is essential when working in early years, and is especially crucial with reduced access to resources; therefore, there was a reliance on colleagues to share the information. Sharing information can be problematic as there appeared to be limited time during the working day for practitioners to share good practice. The challenge of training dissemination was a finding from research conducted by Jenkinson (2013) (see 3.5.4).

Another obstacle to support children as raised by participants was the behaviour of the people with whom they worked. Aleigha shared that some of her colleagues did not seem to understand the children's needs. Aleigha expressed her frustration:

> *it struck me actually…. how uneducated I think some people are about special needs and speech and language and how judgemental people can be which I would've expected not to find actually in settings where people are working with children* (P:15:L1:A).

Ayla also expressed frustration through her role as a SENDCo that relied upon individual key workers to support targeted interventions with children. Ayla explained: "*you are heavily reliant on the key worker, and sometimes the key worker is the issue [pulls a face]… because they can't be bothered…[they say] , 'I can't be bothered today'"*(P13:L2:A). Ayla and Aleigha have demonstrated how important practitioner motivation was when supporting children. Megan made a similar point about a colleague she worked with and stated that "*laziness*" (P6:L1:M) was the reason that assessments and interventions did not happen. The findings could also indicate that the workforce appeared to be feeling stretched and overworked. Evie discussed that she had twenty-four key children to care for at one

point in her career. Some participants listed time as a challenge in supporting interventions with children, suggesting an explanation for the perceived attitudes of colleagues with whom participants worked.

5.8.3 **Parental involvement in support strategies**

Legally, ethically and morally, parents must be consulted about their children's development. Consent must be gained before any further steps to support the child can be taken (DfE, 2015). Gaining consent from parents was a point raised by Poppy. Poppy had been working with a parent for a year to gain consent to apply for support. Similarly, Caurtney shared that parents can be against gaining any support for children: *"they're quite hostile to the idea they're not keen*" (P7:L1:C). Keyleigh also stated: "*we have had a few that have said they don't want us to do anything so we've just done what we can in nursery*" (P8:L1:K). When parents do not give consent for practitioners to take concerns to the next stage, the setting aims to support the child within the setting. However, depending upon how severe the child's needs are, this can be difficult within current ratios and without additional funding to support the child.

Chloe reflected that parents understanding of their children's needs could sometimes impact the effectiveness of the support provided within the setting. Chloe shared her experience of working with parents: *"they [child's parent and grandparent] would keep him off for long periods of time, which would then delay progress*" (P9:L1:C). Keyleigh also commented upon parental understanding but from a process and funding perspective. Keyleigh said: "*I probably think they think it just happens, ….but some parents just ..expect it to happen and they don't realise the amount of .. hoops you have to jump through to get what you need really*" (P8:L1:K). Stoner et al. (2005) highlighted this point and stated that parents do not always understand the support system and can, therefore, impact on trust levels between practitioners and parents if the support is not as a parent feels it should be.

The literature highlighted the importance of parents for the success of interventions (see 3.3.1). Through the comparison of eighteen studies, Robert and Kaiser (2011) identified that children made gains with both receptive and expressive language skills when parents were involved in the intervention. A study by Gibbard et al. (2004) also demonstrated positive gains for children when parents are involved in their children's interventions showing the importance of parental involvement in support strategies.

5.8.4 **Summary of the section**

This section has explored the participants experiences of the support that was available from the LA's in their county. The findings concluded that there appeared to be differences in the support available in each area that could depend upon the way that support is organised within each LA. Participants from L1 discussed the support they could access with a mixture of gratitude and frustration indicating that they had experienced support differently. Participants from L2 appeared to value the support that they were able to access from the LA.

The section also explored internal support strategies utilised by the participants. Participants from L1 appeared to set up and organise their own support strategies, while participants from L2 relied upon strategies they had observed from either the LEYT or SLT services. The section concluded that parental engagement is essential for gaining support for children and identified that parents do not always perceive their child to require additional support which can impact how the participants supported the child within the setting.

5.9 Summary of the findings chapter

This chapter highlighted the findings from the current study. The chapter contained two main sections: conformity through compliance and the prioritisation, organisation and deployment of resources. The first half of the chapter explored the participant's professional responsibilities, and the expectation placed upon them from different perspectives, including themselves, colleagues, managers, local and national government agencies. The chapter concluded that the participant's motivation for training was key in engaging with CPD opportunities that ultimately helped the participants to assess, identify and support the children for whom they cared.

The chapter concluded that participants compliance with non-statutory requests from national and governmental departments that appeared to reinforce the concept of normalised child development agendas through data control mechanisms. The participant's expressed feelings of frustration yet appeared to comply with non-mandatory requests relating to assessment procedures and requests for data, showing overall compliance. The discrepancy relating to the ambiguity of assessment procedures demonstrated that the assessment levels may not necessarily be indicative of the child's development levels. The discrepancies related to the ambiguity and inconsistencies that appeared evident in factors that contribute to practical assessment. For example, the tools used to assess children, how the tools are used and by whom, and the practitioners' qualifications and experience levels who are responsible for assessing children.

The latter half of the chapter explored the prioritisation, organisation and deployment of support services from both internal and external sources. The chapter identified the disparities in how support is organised and prioritised concluding that each LA operates differently. The chapter illuminated that the participants in different geographical locations had access to differing levels of support from both the local health and education authorities, and this impacted the support that was available to support the children. Internal support also appeared to depend on the experiences that participants could

draw upon to support the children within the setting. The following chapter explores the findings from this chapter through a conceptual framework. The chapter seeks to take the findings and examine them through a conceptual lens to provide additional insight, explanation and meaning.

Chapter 6: Conceptual framework

6.1 Introduction

The following chapter outlines the adopted conceptual framework as a lens through which to view the findings from the previous chapter. In section 4.12, I identified that analytical and conceptual framework that was adopted based upon Foucault's(1977 & 1990) work. From the previous chapter categories were identified as discussed by Koopman & Mataza, (2013). From these categories Foucault's thoughts on power and control emerged, expressed in three concepts: the creation and maintenance of a discourse, normalisation and Foucault's ideas on surveillance through panoptical conceptualisation. The conceptual framework provided opportunities for me as the researcher to view the findings of the study through alternative lenses. It created an opportunity to take the findings and explore the possible, more profound meaning that could help to explain specific commonalities within the experiences the participants shared. As stated in section 4.3.1, narrative analysis attempts to capture and reflect the participants' individualised experiences. Themes arose that brought a commonality between experiences through the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) taken within the analysis. The conceptual framework shifts the prism discussed by Richardson (2001) to aid exploration of these findings through a different philosophical perspective to "make the familiar strange" (Mannay, 2016: 31) and gain a deeper understanding of the findings.

Although the three areas are separately defined, they overlap in places, showing the synergy between each of the three concepts. This overlapping is evident within the next sections, where the findings are explored through one specific concept and then examined again under another concept. For example, continuous professional development (CPD) is explored through the creation of professional discourse and discussed again through the lens of self-surveillance. The section explores the role of the government in defining normative levels of development examined from a panoptic surveillance perspective. The chapter explores the mechanics of power

distribution throughout the findings discussed by the participants and serves as a thread woven throughout the chapter. The following section focuses on the central discourse that appeared to apply to the participants within the current study: the participants' professional discourse.

6.2 Introduction to Foucault

Before I begin to apply Foucault's framework, it is necessary to pause and consider the work of Foucault in a broader sense. Foucault believed that normative structures could be a form of control that sought to categorise and identify a person within a society. To move beyond the normative categorisation regardless of where that classification came from, provided opportunities to explore deeper understanding and it is at this point that the distinction within the categorisation begins to break down (Guttings, 2005). Foucault was interested in the creation and maintenance of all societal structures, although focussed on aspects of these structures within his work to emphasise specific examples. These included his works on the History of Sexuality (Foucault, 1990), Discipline and Punish (Foucault, 1977), Truth and Power (1982) The Order of Things (Foucault, 2005) and The Subject and Power (1982). These works (amongst others) provided Foucault with avenues to examine human interaction and the distribution and organisation of power throughout societal structures. Foucault's observations have created opportunities for others to explore aspects of his ideas in ways that apply to specifically to them. This exploration of Foucault's original ideas has led to the creation of new ways of knowing and understanding subjective human experience within social constructs that guide and control individual lives. Foucault's contribution and significance as an intellectual was to focus attention on societal structures through engaging with a range of observations that included "discipline, biopolitics, governmentality, power/knowledge, subjectivation, genealogy, archaeology [and] problematization" among others (Koopman & Matza, 2013: 817). Foucault's observations have been acknowledged and embraced in a variety of different fields including education, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology to

name a few. Foucault's work has encouraged dialogue and discussion that has transcended his original observations to become bound within ever emerging ways of thinking about society that demonstrates the endurance of a legacy left by Foucault that continues to apply in an ever changing world. Foucault encourages individuals to step outside of socially accepted boundaries to critically question social order to challenge the status quo and gain freedom of thought (Ball, 2012).

As stated, Foucault's work is expansive, and it would not be possible within the confines of a thesis of this size to apply all his ideas. Therefore, aspects Foucault's observations have been selectively chosen within the following chapters. I acknowledge that the following chapter is based upon my own novice interpretation of Foucault's work as I perceive it applies to the current context of this study and this could be a limited interpretation. However, I also acknowledge that in this first foray into Foucault, my understanding has deepened, and Foucault has helped me to explore a dialogue and discussion that would not otherwise have been possible.

6.3 The formation of a discourse

The following section will discuss Foucault's thoughts on defining a discourse and how he appeared to view discourse formation. Foucault's thoughts appeared to focus on the formation of discourse initially made up of various concepts serving specific functions within a society, such as a family, place of education, place of work and health (Foucault, 2005; Oliver, 2010). Oliver (2010) explained that concepts are a series of rules or routines that are bound together to help individuals understand each society. For example, a scholarly society includes concepts such as deadlines, rules of referencing the work of others, structures of work or curricula. Each of these concepts serve a specific function within the society. For example, a scholarly society might use a curriculum to fulfil the function of providing a scheme of work for teachers to deliver to students. The concept of referencing serves the function of acknowledging the work of others and showing the reading undertaken by the student. The functions within the concept add to the

formation of a discourse that establishes accepted ways of thinking and being.

Sawyer (2002) explored Foucault's ideas of discourse formation through three stages: 1. discursive formation; 2. positivity and 3. archive. The following section explores these three stages. Sawyer (2002: 434) began by pointing out that discourse is impossible to "precisely" define because of the differences in the concept's application of discourse. The term 'concept' is used throughout this chapter as an idea:

> expressed in making judgements…. [it] connects with such things as recognizing when the term applies…to understand the consequences of its action…. (Blackburn, 2016: 92).

Sawyer (2002) clarified that for Foucault a discourse is created through a set of processes that together form new ways of debating and thinking (see Figure 5). Sawyer (2002) clarified that Foucault's (1972) definition of discourse began with an explanation of discursive formation. Sawyer (2002: 436) defined discursive formation as a "grouping of statements that can be delimited and individualized." Delimited and individualised meant that the statements were bound and limited within four distinct and specific criteria; 1) a series of statements that refer to the same group; 2) the statements must communicate a way of life or being that belongs to a particular group; 3) "share a system of conceptual organization" and 4) share strategies based on "themes and theories."

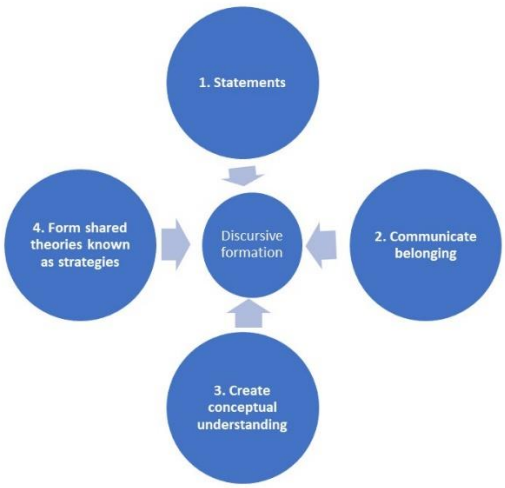

Figure 5: Model adapted from Sawyer (2002) to show the formation of discourse

Sawyer (2002: 436) explained that each criterion is necessary for defining the "unity of discursive formation….[to] achieve individuality and autonomy." Discursive formation could, therefore, be viewed as the essence of discourse that distinguishes one discourse from another, such as a fingerprint or DNA, could distinguish one person from another. Foucault (1982 & 2007) referred to people within a society as subjects. According to Foucault (1982), people are made into subjects by society and government structures that seek to direct the actions of individuals in a specified way. Foucault (1972) discussed discursive formation as a separate way of subjects communicating about ideas, leading on to the next stage of the process.

Discursive formation was evident within the findings and the literature chapters of this report. The analysis of literature highlighted the historical background of the early years sector and the stages in gaining recognition as educators in the educational community (see 2.3). The shift of the sector from a principally care centred vocational role, to a care and educational profession, was driven through policy changes and reflected within modifications to regulating the sector from social services to Ofsted (Owens & Haynes, 2010). The change in the regulatory body from social services to Ofsted signalled changes in how early years practitioners were socially and politically perceived that impacted upon perceptions of professional identity. Foucault (1972) considered that, although the meaning attributed to social constructs, in this case, to the professional identity of practitioners, perceptions of what this role means and to whom, has transformed over time (Oliver, 2010). The changes in meaning do not appear to have happened unilaterally across the sector or within societal or political contexts, creating confusion about what it means to be an early years professional from these opposing perspectives. Societally, the presiding perception of the early years practitioner was to provide care (Gammage, 2006). Politically, the emphasis has changed to perceiving the role of the early years practitioner as the provider of education (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Within the current research, the participants discussed the purpose of early years when sharing their experiences of working with colleagues and parents (see 5.4.1). The

participants appeared to struggle with defining their professional values and their identity within the early years sector. The participants talked about CPD and their powerlessness in complying with procedures they felt did not support the children with whom they worked. The next section explores the next stage of discourse formation defined by Foucault (1972) as positivity.

6.3.1 **Positivity**

Foucault (1972) discussed the following criteria in discourse formation as 'positivity'. Positivity provided opportunities for individuals engaged within a discursive formation with a specified platform to communicate. Positivity "defines a limited space of communication" external to the communication that occurs inside the discursive formation (Foucault, 1972: 126). Positivity brings together external aspects such as books and texts that "belong to a single discursive formation" to connect individuals within a field of interest who can converse and critique discursive elements to achieve a new understanding (Foucault, 1972: 126-127). Foucault stated:

> Different oeuvres, dispersed books, that whole mass of texts that belong to a single discursive formation - and so many authors who know or do not know one another, criticize one another, invalidate one another, pillage one another, meet without knowing it and obstinately intersect their unique discourses in a web of which they are not the masters, of which they cannot see the whole, and of whose breadth they have a very inadequate idea - all these various figures and individuals do not communicate solely by the logical succession of propositions that they advance, nor by the recurrence of themes, nor by the obstinacy of a meaning transmitted, forgotten, and rediscovered; they communicate by the form of positivity of their discourse, or more exactly, this form of positivity……defines a field in which formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges may be deployed (Foucault, 1977:126-127).

The concept of positivity, therefore "characterizes its unity throughout time" (Foucault, 1972: 169). The interaction between authors as termed by Foucault, I interpret as individuals who participate in dialogue not only through books and texts but through engaging and conversing within the discursive formation and then transferring this externally to debate with others. The authors or individuals are defined for this thesis as 'subjects' to use Foucault's (1982) terminology. In the current thesis, the discursive formation could be seen in the debates and practice experiences of individual practitioners within early years settings. Positivity could then relate to the discussions the practitioners have with practitioners from other settings,

through their engagement in literary sources or through training providing the “externality” discussed by Sawyer (2002: 437).

6.3.2 **Archive**

The third concept in discourse formation is the archive. Foucault (1972) discussed the concept of the archive as the underpinning series of statements that have evolved through the stages of positivity where external dialogue has created a new understanding. The archive “defines a particular level” that represents the diversity of statements relating to events and ways of thinking that have emerged and become open to manipulation (Foucault, 1972: 128). The archive is not a collection of everything that has been known about statements within a discourse. Rather, the archive represents the ongoing discussion and dialogue that shapes how subjects consider the events (Foucault, 1972). Foucault (1972: 128) clarified that the archive “is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.” The archive provided the discourse guidelines, although Foucault (1972: 130) indicated that individuals are not always aware of the archive's presence because "it is from within these rules that we speak.” Individuals, in this sense, may have an unconscious understanding of the archive. Established discourse served to provide identity within a specific context, that controlled the role, the language and the behaviour of the individual that becomes the normative (norms) behaviour of the discourse (Sawyer, 2002). The norms become part of the process of control within the discourse (Foucault, 2005). The accepted discourse helps in the establishment of normative (normal) behaviour in the society by the subjects who adopt and uphold standards. Foucault (2005) argued that the individual’s skill is to move fluently from one mode of discourse to another. Although concepts may change within the discourse, the words and language remain the same and therefore, meaning transforms (Foucault,1972; Oliver, 2010) as shown within the archive stage of discourse formation. A phrase or word can mean different things at different times, and therefore, discourse is temporal. Foucault (1972: 126-127) argued that for discourse to transform, the dialogue between subjects that “criticize….invalidate… and pillage one another” create tension that

questions the established statements within a discourse that breaks the existing status quo to enable new ideas to emerge and become dominant.

Phillips (2002) claimed that resistance is necessary in order for discourse to change and transform. Resistance serves as an impetus for transformation due to the tension caused by resistance that creates new opportunities for change. However, for transformation to occur, the resistance has to be forcible enough for a “gap” to appear in the existing discourse (Phillips, 2002: 333). The gap creates an opportunity for newly transformed ways of thinking to emerge known as “discourse formation” which “creates an illusion of authority” that becomes the newly accepted discourse (Phillips, 2002: 333).

6.3.3 Professional Discourse formation

The previous sections have explored how Foucault (1972) visualised discourse formation. The following section explores Foucault’s (1972) vision of discourse as I perceive it to relate to the current study by exploring the participants’ perceptions of professional identity. The theme of continuous professional development (CPD) was a finding from the previous chapter, and I take it here to explore how the participants’ appeared to perceive CPD concerning their professional identity. Sawyer (2012: 437) explained that “unity throughout time,” could characterise the discourse whereas archive refers to the general “system of the formation and transformation” of themes and statements. Positivity and archive could be considered symbiotic processes in the formation and transformation of a system through the continuous dialogue within the discourse that provided unity throughout time. Therefore, the two processes are discussed together in this section concerning the stages of discourse formation applicability to the current study.

Participants in the current study addressed the need for education and its effect on their professional roles. The participants discussed how the CPD opportunities that they engaged with contributed to their understanding and definitions of professionalism that could be related to the professional

discourse of the sector. Positive regard for CPD could be evidenced with some participants who gave the impression that they engaged in CPD activities with pride and saw it as a critical component of how they perceived their role. When the participants discussed their journey from entering the early years sector, many used the CPD opportunities that they had engaged in as milestones to mark the passage of time throughout their careers (see Appendix J). The use of CPD as a milestone marker that marked their quest towards professionalism appeared to illuminate the participants' perceptions of their professional identity.

For many of the participants in the current study, being an early years professional seemed to mean engaging in CPD programmes, so they could not understand why their colleagues chose not to engage in CPD. Chloe and Megan both seemed to consider colleagues, who did not improve their skills, negatively, suggesting that they could view these colleagues as making a deliberate effort not to help the children they interacted with to the best of their ability. These seemingly negative perceptions may relate to the archive element of discourse formation when individuals were not always aware of the archive where prior information is "formed and transformed" (Foucault, 1972: 130). The formation and transformation of knowledge could suggest that the seemingly negatively held perceptions of the participants about their peers came from a pre-established statement in the archive that expressed positive regard for CPD to support professional identity. The disparities between those professionals participating in CPD opportunities and those who chose not to, may show the differences in how participants viewed their position and what it means to be a professional, creating disparity about professional identity. CPD in this respect could be a value that shapes the behaviour of the subjects within the discourse.

The views of participants can be examined against the earlier literature to provide some context to understand these views. The development of the early years workforce and the evolving issue of professional identity has been debated within the literature over the last seventy years and shows both unity and transformation (Bertram & Pascal, 2001 & 2002). CPD has

become a common trend in the early years sector through the transformation from primarily underqualified practitioners (Hordern, 2013) to a focus on skilled workers, through a government-driven sponsorship to raise the qualification levels of the workforce through the Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) (Mathers et al. 2011). The shift in focus shaped the discourse within the sector to project a view that CPD was so crucial that the government were willing to fund practitioners to increase their qualification levels. The participants' perceptions of professionalism achieved through CPD as viewed through the conceptual framework concept of positivity could be characterised by "its unity throughout time" (Foucault, 1972: 169). Although the government ceased funding for CPD for the early years workforce, the message was still communicated through references to research. The REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002) and EPPE projects (Sylva et al. 2004) and government publications (Nutbrown, 2012) for example, highlighted the message that the professionalism of the workforce depended upon CPD (Elwick et al. 2018). The political message concerning CPD was that practitioners must engage in supporting the child evidenced through policy documents such as the Statutory Welfare Requirements for the sector that communicate these messages (DfE, 2017a). Ratios are calculated based upon the levels of qualifications a practitioner has, therefore, suggesting qualifications are both a necessary and compulsory function of the practitioner role. The perception of these documents could serve as a control mechanism through which practitioners receive the message that CPD is part of their professional identity and essential to supporting children and again links back to discursive formation and positivity (Foucault, 1972). Lack of engagement in these activities by colleagues could, therefore, be perceived by the participants as unprofessional. Foucault (1972) might have suggested that the attitudes of the participants towards CPD may be evidence of the transformation of the discourse since the government drive towards a qualified early years workforce (Mathers et al. 2011).

The message of CPD's continued importance to professional development through the momentum of research and government-issued publications appeared to be evident within the experiences of some participants. For

example, the participants' frustration at the lack of government-funded CPD, did not appear to diminish their enthusiasm in accessing self-funded CPD opportunities. Evie and Mia specifically discussed the need to self-fund their CPD and saw it as a necessary part of their role that supported their professional development and identity within the sector. Evie commented: *"it's whether you want to help them any more than you already do,"* (P5:L1:E) suggesting an emotional response to gaining additional skills to support the children with whom she worked. The emotional response could indicate the historical care principles of the profession that have transformed to take on new meaning, linking to transformation discussed within the archive (Foucault, 1972). Historically, care indicated attachments through physical and emotional caregiving responses to the child's needs (Gammage, 2006). Evie's response may show that there could be a change occurring within the sector from an emphasis on care through attachments to caring for the child's educational development (Gammage, 2006). Evie's statement indicated that what care means in a professional sense could change, highlighting the argument that words can take on new meaning (Oliver, 2010). Evie's comment could also be an emotional response elicited through feelings of guilt; if the practitioner cares about a child, then it is their responsibility to ensure that the child receives the support needed, rather than the responsibility of the government or the setting.

Some participants within the current study looked for ways to engage in CPD with minimal disruption to the setting through self-funding courses and attending on weekends or through accessing online courses. The finding could suggest that the discourse has transformed to the extent that the participants in this study overlooked the lack of pay and funding and continued with CPD through the mechanisms of emotional power, and could suggest "unity throughout time" (Foucault, 1972: 169). The unity throughout time concerning CPD can be seen by examining the trajectory of the sector's response to professional development. The finding also links to the final 'archived' element of discourse formation where the archive provided the rules of the discourse that may or may not be known consciously by the practitioners (Foucault,1972: 130). These rules, both written and unspoken,

guide practitioners in the choices they make and become part of the self-governing aspect of the framework discussed within the next two sections.

This section has explored how CPD has contributed to the formation of a professional discourse for practitioners. The section explored the findings of the current study concerning how the participants appeared to perceive the role of CPD in developing their professional identity. The following section identifies Foucault's (1977) thoughts on the role of normalisation within societies.

6.4 Foucault: Normativity and normalisation as power

The following sections explore Foucault's (1977) thoughts on normalisation as a cog in the system of control. The section begins by exploring the role of normalisation within a society, then moves on to examine the process of normalisation. The section will identify how normalisation relates to the current findings. Key terms will be defined and debated to provide context to the discussions.

Foucault (1977) discussed the establishment of normal modes of being within a society as a control mechanism through which the subject, as part of a broader discourse, monitors and judges the behaviour of others. Acceptable and unacceptable human behaviour had been shaped throughout time by the threat of punishment. Foucault (1977: 183) perceived punishment both literally and conceptually with the objective of punishment through "penalties" as a tool that sought to restore the subjects' acceptability by creating "value-giving measures." In this sense, the punishment could be a threat which would somehow deprive the subject, for example, the threat of deprivation of freedom or punishment for non-compliance such as a monetary fine.

Foucault (1977) considered that measurements based on values are used as a method to achieve homogeny or the normalisation of society. He argued that these mechanisms are evident across all levels of a social hierarchy, for example, the government or the head of a religious organisation, from the

individual levels to the highest levels of society. In terms of the government, Foucault argued that control is gained through government instigated and enforced norms that apply to all aspects of societal existence (Oliver, 2010).

Foucault (1977) established that preserving normativity is governed by the subjects within the discourse, in this case, practitioners within the early years sector. Normativity is maintained by self-governance through adhering to the agreed statements and themes set within the discourse and by evaluating the actions of others within the discourse (Foucault, 1972). The maintenance of normativity was evident within the current study in the examples provided by participants and, in the participants' use and compliance of the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) as a tool for assessing children's development towards expected (normative) levels.

Foucault (2000: 111) discussed the government's reliance on science to determine norms. Foucault (2000) pointed out that science is a process of evolution, and so definitions of normalised behaviour change and transform as scientific understanding improves and transforms. The evolution of science in determining normativity is a factor in shaping the accepted discourse, although concepts or ideas shift and alter within a discourse, the words often stay the same and come to reflect a different meaning (Foucault, 2005: 113). The changing meaning can confuse individuals when concerning definitions of "normal" discussed in the next section.

6.4.1 **The Normalisation process**

The following section explores the normalisation process by exploring the underpinning definitions of values and behaviours that Foucault (1977) saw as essential to understanding the development of normal modes of behaviour within a society. The section defines the words norm and normativity and identifies how these terms are used in the normalisation process.

Deleuze (1992) presented the view that definitions of control have evolved. According to Deleuze (1992: 3) and building on the work of Foucault, regulation and control has historically been based on what he called "disciplinary societies." Society consists of different groups that individuals pass through and these groups are acknowledged by Deleuze (1992) as societies (see Figure 6: To illustrate disciplinary societies).

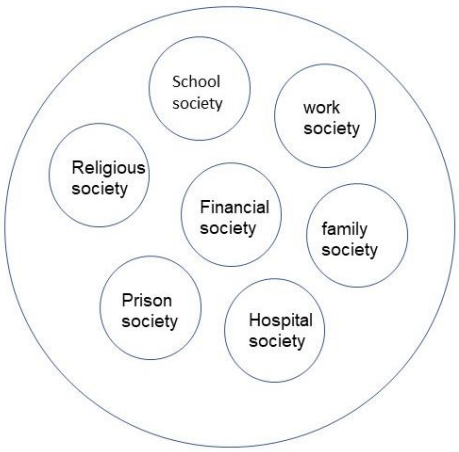

Figure 6: To illustrate disciplinary societies

Each society was context-bound and controlled within each community. Disciplinary societies operated within boundaries, such as a school, prison or hospital. Each society worked on a set of rules adhered to by societies “environments of enclosure” (Deleuze, 1992: 3). The individual stepped from one enclosed disciplinary society to another and “each had its own laws” (Deleuze, 1992: 3). In this sense, Deleuze (1992: 6) argued, discipline was of “long duration, infinite and discontinuous” suggesting little reprieve or responsiveness to transformation. Deleuze argued that disciplinary societies identified subjects by their signature and an administrative number that

positioned the subject within the societal boundaries. For example, within a prison or scholarly society, the prisoner or student would be given a number as a form of identification. Within a financial society, a combination of the subjects' signature and account number would aid as identifiers to the individual as they move from one environment to another.

Deleuze (1992: 4) argued that "societies of control" were replacing "disciplinary societies." The distinction between the two forms of control, according to Deleuze, is that "societies of control" exercised control without limits or boundaries. Control in this sense was exercised over the whole society, and not in an enclosed environment like a school. Societies of control removed the need for signatures and numbers and replaced them with codes. The evolvement of codes either granted or rejected access to information and in this way, control is not limited or bound within specific environments, therefore, enabling movement between the environments (Deleuze,1992). Deleuze (1992: 5) argued that in societies of control, individuals have become "dividuals." The point appears to suggest that individuality has become lost within societies and denoted as "masses, samples, data, markets, or banks" (Deleuze, 1992:5). In this sense, "dividuals" are grouped under commonalities that identified the subject as part of a group that could be controlled.

Beniger (2009: 7) defined control as the "purposive influence toward a predetermined goal." Whereas, Costas (2012: 378), defined control as the "orchestration and mobilization of resources, outputs, and individuals toward certain ends." In this respect, 'dividuals' become the resources and outputs. The aim of control in this respect is to "indirectly mold employee selves through instilling certain norms, values, and beliefs" (Costas, 2012: 378). The inclusion of values concerning control is an essential distinction as control relates to the creation and enforcement of value-laden goals. Shaver and Strong (1976: 15, as cited in Halstead, 1996: 6) provided a general definition of values as:

> values are our standards and principles of judging worth. They are the criteria by which we judge 'things' (people, objects, ideas, actions and situations) to be good, worthwhile, desirable; or, on the other hand, bad, worthless or despicable.

This definition is generic and suggests that values are a set of standards that can apply to any context. Halstead (1996: 5) however, provided a contextual definition for the term values concerning education as:

> the term values is used to refer to principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as reference points in decision-making or evaluation of beliefs or action.

Halstead's (1996) definition appeared to suggest that values are context-bound due to the reference to "guides to behaviour." Norris (1994: 63) suggested that "values can only be realised through a project of shared endeavour." Values and behaviour provide alternative perspectives that are subjective and therefore, in need of defining. Within section 2.5.1, I discussed the purpose of education, and I determined that different governments have different perceptions of the purpose of education. These perceptions are based on what the governing body values concerning education; for example, the New Labour government (1997-2010) appeared to value education as a process of reducing social inequality (Stewart, 2005). Conversely, the Conservative government (2015-present) appeared to value education that promoted an economy-driven approach (Gibbs, 2015) and emphasised economic intelligence as a commodity to be traded (Hayler, 2017). Thus, these values were seen in educational policies that conveyed teachers and children's actions to achieve these visions.

Rigby (2008: 29) noted that "behaviour is context-dependent and not independent" suggesting that the context can alter the behaviour of the subject. Behaviour and values formulate socially acceptable or unacceptable behaviour within a discourse. Foucault (2005) defined socially acceptable activities as normative behaviour. Foucault (1977: 77-78, as cited in Jardine, 2005: 49) stated: "our 20th-century Western society, a disciplinary society,

tells us not only what we must be and do, but how we must do it," suggesting that he perceived society as a driver for behaviour and action. Rivest and Moreau (2015: 1861) presented Foucault's definition of socially acceptable behaviour as the "idea of an average acceptable mode of conduct" defined as normative (norm) behaviour. Therefore, Rivest and Moreau (2015: 1861) defined a norm as:

> "a common set of referents that enables individuals to communicate and understand one another and also themselves; they create conditions of possibility, action and identification."

This definition appeared to suggest that norms provided the language through which subjects within a society can relate to one another. Foucault (2010: 262, as cited in Rivest & Moreau, 2015: 1861) theorised that the creation of norms is derived from a combination of two factors: "the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population." The concept of biopower could explain the discipline of the body and regulation of the population. Biopower can be defined as: "the basic biological features of the human species …[that becomes] the object of a political strategy, a general strategy of power" (Foucault, 2007: 2). In this respect, biopower is the ability to create power through the subjects within a society. Societies, or in this instance, an educational society, controls the behaviour and communication (Foucault, 1982). Foucault (1982: 787) stated that societies:

> …ensures aptitudes or types of behavior is developed …by…..regulated communications (questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the "value" of each person and of the levels of knowledge).

The society creates parameters by which acceptable and unacceptable behaviours are determined by placing a value judgement that determines the place of the subject within the society. This value becomes a norm that is controlled through power processes, as Foucault (1982: 787) highlighted: "the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy)." Concerning the current study, values appeared to have been decided concerning CPD, the behaviours of colleagues and children and the development levels of the children with whom the participants worked. The establishment of norms

created the opportunity for the subsequent maintenance of the norms through penalty control measures (Foucault, 1977: 183).

Taylor (2009) defined the process of normalisation as a system where socially accepted norms become so entrenched within a society that they are accepted without question or challenge; Taylor (2009: 47) termed this process “normalising the norm.” In this respect, “normalising norms encourage subjects to become highly efficient at performing a narrowly defined range of practices” (Taylor, 2009: 47). Rivest and Moreau (2015: 1862) argued that society had moved away from an “allowed/forbidden dichotomy” towards placing “responsibility on individuals” and stated:

> “the imperative to not only be the person one wishes to be but, more importantly, to be continuously engaged in becoming this idealised self is an integral part of contemporary social normativity.”

Normativity is, therefore, characterised as the individual responsibility towards the societal group by concentrating, managing and maintaining socially defined behavioural standards. In this sense, referring to the discussion on the participants in the current study, engaging in CPD could be seen as part of the normalisation process. The participants appeared to have accepted that CPD was an individual responsibility and therefore “engaged in becoming this idealised self” that acknowledged their societal responsibility (Rivest & Moreau, 2012: 1862).

Rivest and Moreau (2015: 1861) stated that societies require a “common set of referents,” referred to by Foucault (1972) as statements or themes. These referents enable communication and shared understanding of common goals known as established normative levels. Concerning the current study, common referents might explain the driving force behind attainment levels for speech and language development. These common referents, communicated through language Foucault (2007: 2) called a “biological feature of the human species,” directed the values and behaviour of the society and therefore “became the object of a political strategy, a general strategy of power.” The sooner children can understand and use language,

the sooner they can begin to understand and conform to the common referents within the societies to whom they are connected.

This section has identified the process of normalisation; the following section explores how normative language development measures are applied to the current study through the experiences of the participants as they discussed the tools that they used to assess children's language development and how this was maintained.

6.4.2 Normative language development

The following section begins with a reminder of how the literature defines normative language development, before moving on to discuss the tools that are used by the participants in the current study to assess children's language skills. The section explores how the participants maintain normative language levels through the experiences that they shared.

Section 2.9.1 attempted to define language development and highlighted the challenges of pinpointing normative language development at specific ages and stages of a child's developmental journey because of the variations in language development across children of similar ages. Therefore, it is challenging to create a specific discourse for normative language development that is defined by age-related milestones. Instead, it appeared, that understanding of normative language development differed according to perspective, creating a splintered discourse for normative language development reflected by differing perspectives. The following section explores this splintering and how this has affected the participants' understanding of normative language development within the current study.

The early years practitioner's role involves working with a range of different professionals in different contexts, besides working with children and their parents. Each group of people that the participants connect with belong to other societies who have a different understanding of normative language development based on alternative language measures. For example, health

visitors make cursory checks on language (Wilson et al. 2013), SLT use standardised tests to find the level of language development (Messer & Dockrell, 2013), and parents often rely on their experiences of other children within the family to compare their own children's language against (Prelock et al. 2008). According to the literature, practitioners appeared to rely on the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) to decide language development levels, and the current study supported this. The different approaches to determining language development levels appear to have created an inconsistent approach to defining normative language levels in children, creating challenges for the participants in determining SLCN. Foucault (2010: 262 as cited in Rivest & Moreau 2015: 1861) discussed the process of normalisation as "the regulation of the population," to establish a benchmark for acceptable behaviour. I refer to behaviour in this respect to how language develops in children.

The EYFS (DfE, 2012b) could be seen as a common referent (Rivest & Moreau, 2015) between the participants that provided a language that they understood, if not wholly agreed with, to identify language development levels. Participants discussed the challenges of the EYFS in aiding their understanding of language development; however, they appeared to accept the current system because that is "*just the way it is" (P13:L2:A).* Taylor's (2009: 47) definition of "normalizing the norm" could be applied here where it appeared to have become acceptable within the early years sector to use the EYFS without question, potentially showing that the acceptance of the EYFS has become so entrenched within the sector it is not questioned or widely challenged (Taylor, 2009). Through this common understanding, individuals create "conditions of possibility, action and identification" (Rivest & Moreau, 2015: 1861). Comments made by the participants, specifically Ayla, identified perceived flaws in the current government tool used to control normative development (EYFS) (DfE, 2012b) and could demonstrate emerging resistance (Phillips, 2002) through Ayla's apparent frustration of the system. Foucault (1982) discussed that for change to occur, resistance was needed. During our conversation, Ayla mentioned that her goal was to change her profession, suggesting resignation to the current situation, and in

which she appeared to feel disempowered and could be seen as orchestrating her own form of uprising by leaving and refusing to accept the status quo.

Children need to develop speech and language skills to access their societies. Speech and language development underpin social acceptability and provides a code through which individuals come to learn and understand the rules of each society (Hadley & Rice, 1991). Section 3.8 highlighted the impact of SLCN on mental health conditions, attainment, life chances, and social and peer relationships that emphasises the importance of speech and language skills to the quality of a subjects life within all societies. Speech and language are the building blocks through which individuals come to understand their social worlds (Yew & O'Kearney, 2013). The importance of speech and language skills was evident in the current findings. Part of the participant's role as practitioners was teaching children codes of behaviour through the communication aid of speech and language. Ruby shared her experiences of children's behaviour as "*angry*" and "*frustrated*" *(P10:L2:R)* when experiencing an SLCN. Other participants shared similar stories and emphasised the perceived negative behaviour of the children because of SLCN. The finding could suggest that the codes of "social normativity" discussed by Rivest and Moreau (2015) are the compass the participants used to exert "purposive influence" toward specific goals, for example, the accepted and unaccepted modes of behaviour exhibited by the children (Beniger, 2009: 7).

The creation of several mechanisms to support the maintenance of normative development appeared to be evident within the points expressed by participants. This appeared to be evidenced in the discussions relating to the external support from SLT services through the standardised sheets that were sent out to children's carers to support language development (see 5.6.8). Participants shared that all children with any form of SLCN received the same standardised support sheet. The SLT sheet appeared to epitomise the point all children get the same sheet because all children of a set age should be doing the same things and achieving the same levels. The

apparent goal here is to promote normativity and ensure that all children operate within the normal ranges as set out by the government. Strategies that have proven to help the child reach the required level are repeated with other children as they are considered successful in getting the children to the expected (normative) standard.

The participants also discussed conducting a baseline assessment on all children upon entry to the setting to establish their development levels against the criteria discussed previously (Glazzard, 2014). A baseline is a mechanism that helps the participants to control and measure development against prescribed criteria or as Beniger (2009: 7) stated, the baseline provided a "purposive influence toward a predetermined goal." Purposive influence towards goals was further evidenced by the participants when discussing tracking children's development and attainment levels against each ELG using the "emerging, expected and exceeding" criteria (Glazzard, 2014: 75). Here, the participants appeared to be purposively influencing development in the "predetermined" ELGs. Specific software has been developed to aid practitioners to identify the gaps within children's development profiles and the participants specifically discussed Tapestry as a development tracker. The gaps indicated areas that the children were not meeting expected (normative) levels of development and therefore require intervention to bring them back within the expected range. Intervention, in this sense, could indicate efforts to bring individuals back within acceptable limits (Foucault, 1977:183). Intervention could be seen as a penalty to a child who may be removed from the main group to work on "gaps" in their developmental profiles. Intervention could also be perceived as a penalty for practitioners, as this could indicate increased workload to bring children back into acceptable limits.

6.4.3 **Controlling normativity**

The previous sections explored definitions of normative language development. The following section explores how normativity is controlled through labelling children as having a special educational need, the early years curriculum, the training participants received, and the funding and support available to them. The section explores the participant's attempts to support those children who were at the emerging level or below for the ELG in the area of communication and language (DfE, 2012b). To add further clarity, a child who is achieving the expected levels of development could be described as achieving normative levels of development (Glazzard, 2014). Those children who were not within prescribed normative levels of development could be described as having special educational needs (SEND) (DfE, 2015). The SENDCoP (DfE, 2015:16) identified communication and interaction as a broad area of need that children may experience that could have an "adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." The statement suggested that children who are not achieving the expected (normative) levels of development, therefore, require support to help them with "normal" activities.

Oliver (2010) discussed that Foucault did not subscribe to the pre-determined societal definitions of normative behaviours. Foucault (1982) appeared to suggest that he observed the social structures that utilized societal norms as a process of acceptance or rejection. Historically people who did not behave in socially acceptable ways were considered or labelled insane and then segregated from the rest of society (Foucault,1977). Foucault (1977) considered that the establishment of defined norms excluded those who did not fit normative definitions and are therefore labelled 'abnormal.' Ball (2012: 100) explained that the organisation of educational systems can be viewed as a process that seeks to "fix and repair divergence from the norms." Conversely, the use of a label as a categorisation can aid in identifying support that an individual might need (Norwich, 2014). However, Armstrong (1995: 396) argued that this categorisation created a situation he termed "problematisation of the normal." This term creates an image of children in

some developmental regions who are considered ‘inadequate’ or ‘deficient’. In this context, the label forms part of the mechanisms that control definitions of normal and abnormal development. Discussions from the participants surrounding the number of times a child had to demonstrate a skill or competency before being considered as at the “expected” (normal) level of development, provided further insight into the extent the participants attempted to comply to the guidance. Participants made “best-fit decisions” (DfE, 2013a: 3), due to the lack of guidelines on how often a child must be observed completing a task to achieve an ELG. The finding suggested that children may be labelled as ‘deficient’ or ‘abnormal’ using a deficit system that seeks to recognise normativity to the exclusion of all else.

Applying Foucault’s (1977) work to this perspective might indicate that controlled societal norms through sanctions ensured the maintenance of existing norms. Where normative measures are not a possibility, for example, for those children who are perceived to have a SEND, the creation of the label ‘SEND’ justified why the individual is not operating within normative measures. The label provided an acceptable caveat for a society that segregated those who do not currently or will never meet the “pre-determined goals” regardless of any “purposive influences” (Beniger, 2009). In this respect, the label ‘SEND’ could be seen as a form of segregation that provided a social acknowledgement that the child is not working within the expected levels, so that others within the society understand and adapt their behaviour towards the child accordingly. The label also suggested that the child is not ‘normal’ compared to their peers and therefore requires interventions to support them towards normativity. Section 3.3.1considered the issue of labelling. Algraigray and Boyle (2017) discussed the use of labels by society as a system that attempts to organise and categorise individuals. Using labels could be seen as a mechanism that “indirectly molds” individuals through the installation of “certain norms, values, and beliefs” (Costas, 2012: 378). Labels in this instance could be perceived to enforce acceptable norms by excluding behaviours that do not meet the prescribed criteria.

In this respect, subjects who did not appear to fit within 'normal' parameters set by a society require 'fixing,' in some way, to become normal and thus accepted by a society, reflecting the medical model of disability. The medical model aims to "fix, cure, accommodate or perhaps endure" the alleged disability or 'abnormality' of the subject (Andrews et al. 2000: 259). The participants shared that part of their role was to identify gaps in the children's development. As discussed, in the child development profiles, the gap is the difference between expected levels of attainment and actual levels of attainment for each ELG (Becker, 2011). The perceived aim of the participants appeared to be, therefore, to **"***help them and bring them up to where they need to be*" (P8:L1:K). Keyleighs' comment appeared to suggest that the child has an ELG deficit, and therefore in her role, she must recognise this deficit and take steps to aid the child in reaching the expected development level. The wording in the SENDCoP could strengthen Keyleigh's view, implying that children who do not reach the expected levels of development require help (DfE, 2015: 67). The focus of aiding children towards meeting normative levels and Keyleigh, in her role, appeared to be aware of both government policy towards this goal and the values attached to the sector discourse. This finding resonates with Foucault's (1977) discussion on maintaining normativity through apparent coercive tactics such as government policy and his ideas on a discursive formation (Foucault, 1972).

Interventions to support the child was a focal aspect of the conversational interviews and discussed with all participants, except Corrie, who felt that children's development should not be rushed or coerced stating "*sometimes that child's just immature"* (P4:L2:C). Corrie's comment appeared to suggest that she believed that with time the child will develop the language skills and therefore appeared to reject the notion of normative development concerning chronological age. The other participants discussed interventions and support to aid children in meeting ELG's at the expected level. The finding could suggest that the emphasis for these participants is supporting children to meet the expected levels of development, or as Andrews et. al. (2000)

stated, the participants worked on “fixing” the child to help them work towards acceptability.

Many of the participants shared that they perceived the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) as suitable for those children with a normal development trajectory, however, they felt that the EYFS was not suitable for those children with either a SEND or who spoke English as an additional language (EAL). The participants discussed that assessments using the EYFS for children who were defined as either EAL or SEND did not accurately represent the children’s abilities. Ayla’s statement that “*the child is underperforming, but he’s not*” (P13:L2:A) could show that she may perceive that the current system does not accurately reflect the abilities of the children. From Ayla’s perspective, the structure of the current system defined any child not meeting the expected levels of development for their age and stage as underperformers. This finding resonated with Palaiologou and Male’s (2019: 26) point that the system was: “creating the performer child, where outcomes, goals and outputs are observable and measurable.” Thus, the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) could be described as a system that helps to promote normativity and recognise deficiencies, thus could be considered a deficit education model.

Training to support children’s SLCN was discussed throughout the conversations with the participants. Poppy discussed the SENDCo training as an opportunity to learn about defined developmental norms. Poppy also discussed the training as an opportunity to learn about the processes involved in completing funding related documentation. Other participants also focussed on funding to enable them to have time to work with children to support them in meeting the expected levels of development. Poppy suggested that the point of funding was to ensure that children reach the expected levels of development and “*to highlight these issues earlier, to improve statistics moving forward*” (P12:L2:P). Poppy’s statement seemed to indicate that the driving force behind the funding is for more children to meet expected levels of development in order to be considered ‘normal’ by government-specified criteria. This point could link to Foucault’s (1977) ideas on maintaining normativity where subjects who did not fit within societal

definitions of normal were segregated until they returned to exhibiting 'normal' behaviour.

This section defined the terms norm, normativity and normalisation. The section explored the process of normalisation as I perceived it to relate to the current study. The section explored normative language development controlled through the early years curriculum of the EYFS and how the process of "normalising norms" (Taylor, 2009: 47) could be applied to the current study. The focus of control through normalisation was identified. The next section explores control through Foucault's (1977) perception of panoptical surveillance.

6.5 Panoptical Surveillance: Introduction

The following section explores the origin of the panopticon through Bentham's original designs and then explores Foucault's philosophical conceptualisation of panoptical surveillance as a mechanism of discipline and control throughout societal structures. A panopticon was the name given to describe an architectural design for a building visualised by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century (Elmer, 2012). Foucault (1977: 200) described the plans for the building:

> ..an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building.

The panoptic prison design would have allowed prison officials the maximum range of surveillance inside the prison complex. The prisoners would have the sense of being constantly watched, but have a limited knowledge of how many guards were watching them (Gutting, 2005). Foucault (1977) claimed constant supervision discouraged prisoners from breaking the rules as they were never sure who was watching and thus if they would be caught and punished. The main point of the building was that it provided a means of "being seen without being seen" (Deleuze, 2006: 49). However, Elmer

(2012) discussed that Bentham and Foucault's perspectives differed concerning the primary focus of the building. Foucault considered the focus of the panopticon was that the prisoners were "being watched," whereas, for Bentham, the focus was of the guards "watching" (Elmer, 2012: 23). Bentham's vision of the panopticon design meant that the prison guards were effectively trapped or segregated inside the centre of the building and therefore, the panopticon, became a symbol of oppression from all perspectives (Elmer, 2012: 23). Deleuze (2006: 29) therefore argued that the concept of panopticism shifts from "to see without being seen" to imposing particular conduct on a "particular human multiplicity." Panopticism, therefore, according to Foucault:

> is the discipline mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come (1977: 209).

Therefore, panopticism was a philosophical concept developed by Foucault (1977) to explain the regulation of power and control within a society. Panopticism involves the partitioning and segregation to aid control through surveillance; the process of watching (Bentham) and being watched (Foucault) (Elmer, 2012). Foucault (1977: 209) proposed that because of the evolution of society in measuring and monitoring individuals, the panoptical principle could be applied to all aspects of human life as "the discipline mechanism." Lyon (2011: 3) posited the view that "surveillance has two faces," on the one hand surveillance can serve to "care and protect" or to "constrain and control." Efforts to control and constrain use coercive tactics that "only result out of the misuse of data/objects collected by surveillance systems, for example by misidentifying the innocent as the guilty" (Elmer, 2012: 25). Foucault (1977: 215 as cited in Elmer, 2012) summarised:

> Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets, it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology.

Oliver (2010) asserted that Foucault was not interested in how power is controlled by individual's, rather the mechanics of power distribution within society. According to Oliver (2010), Foucault considered that power structures are generated within society for a variety of reasons, and was a necessary function of social existence. Foucault considered power was not only directional from state to subjects but also as a force that operates in all relationships within and throughout society, on a person-to-person level. The function of power is as a mechanism by which knowledge is created, understood and accepted to establish cohesion and order within societal structures (Foucault, 1990).

The following section discusses how the participants from the current study sustained this cycle within the examples provided by the literature and findings. The previous section focussed on the child's development, the current section focuses on the mechanisms of control exerted through four primary structural levels; the national government, the local authority, the management system within the early years setting and then the individual practitioners who govern both self and others. Figure 7 demonstrates the control flow diagrammatically, but it is important to note that control is not necessarily exercised through a series of structures. Control can be exerted directly from the government to the practitioner or from Ofsted to the settings. Similarly, control, in some instances, could flow the other way and be exerted through resistance, as discussed by Foucault (1982). Therefore, the diagram serves to illustrate the processes depicted within the current study evidenced through the experiences of the participants.

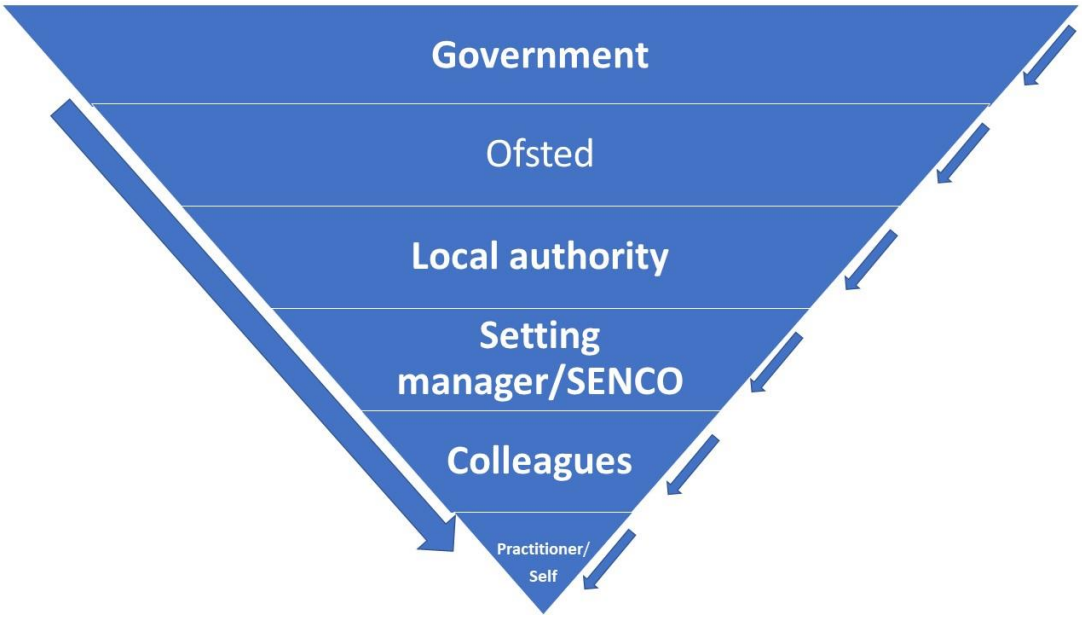

Figure 7: Diagram to show the flow of control from government to practitioner

6.5.1 **Government surveillance**

The previous section summarised Foucault's (1977) vision on panoptical surveillance and how this function as a mechanism of power and control within a society. The following section explores how surveillance might be perceived concerning the government identified through the responses of the participants in the current study. Government surveillance concerning this thesis takes two forms, the surveillance of child development norms and surveillance of the sector in maintaining those norms through a variety of mechanisms as discussed in the previous section. Ball (2012) makes an important distinction concerning Foucault's use of the term 'government.' The government in the sense discussed within this thesis refers to the modern interpretation of an elected political party that governs the country. Foucault used the term 'government' more broadly to refer to "the guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul" (Ball, 2012: 127). In this sense, government is concerned with guidance based upon principles, standards and morals. Halstead (1996: 5), provided a definition that related to principles and standards that "…act as general

guides to behaviour or as a reference point… in decision-making or evaluation." In this sense, the ELG within the EYFS could be perceived as value-laden statements that practitioners use as a reference point in the assessment and evaluation process. The EYFS (DfE, 2012b; 2017a) could, therefore, be viewed as a system of control in the maintenance of normative values. Although practitioners must adhere to the Statutory Welfare Requirements (DfE, 2017a) the Development Matters documentation (DfE, 2012b) is non-statutory; however, participants in the current study discussed the requirement to conform to using both documents.

Government surveillance was evident in the current study through participant discussions that centred around the early years curriculum and the regulatory body of Ofsted. Kailah discussed the feelings of pressure to evidence how she was helping children to achieve the expected levels within each ELG stating: *"Ofsted …. come in and say 'which one's your key children tell me where that child's sat at.' But like I say it's having …I hate the word evidence to say that that child can do it"* (P4:L1:K). Kailah's comment appeared to suggest that she is aware of Ofsted's remit. Kailah's example could be related to Deleuze's (2006: 49) view that the panopticon principle was "to be seen without being seen." Ofsted typically inspects settings every four years (Ofsted, 2019), with inspections typically taking around a day to complete, demonstrating the limited time Ofsted is physically present in a setting. However, Kailah seemed to have a constant awareness of Ofsted that influenced her daily practice. Kailah's awareness appeared to indicate that although Ofsted visits are infrequent, there is a daily awareness of their presence, practitioners see Ofsted symbolically without being seen physically. Foucault's (1977) perception of the panopticon was the concept of being watched, and this appeared to resonate with the participants in the current study. Corrie also discussed Ofsted inspections in her interview and shared her feelings and the feelings of colleagues before an impending inspection with apparent trepidation. The feeling of judgement from a government body that can impact the settings ability to operate or access funding (DfE, 2018b), appeared to instil fear that acted as a motivator for compliance despite significant gaps in time between inspection visits.

The threat of punishment through penalties could operate in both literal and conceptual ways (Foucault, 1977). As with a prison, the participants were never aware of when an Ofsted inspection will take place, and this serves as a compliance motivator. Deleuze (2006: 29) discussed that the feeling of being watched, imposed specific forms of conduct, as seen in the comments made by Kailah, who appeared always to be aware that she needed to know the exact development profiles of the children for whom she cared. Foucault (1977: 209) termed this a “discipline mechanism” that coerced the desired behaviour through the feeling of constant surveillance.

The finding highlighted the mechanisms through which normative child development is controlled and monitored at both local and national government levels (see Figure 7). The government created curriculum documentation where normative development levels are identified for all children from birth to five years old (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2012b). Regulation, exercised in the form of Ofsted by the government, governed the sector and the LA, which managed the funding on which early years settings depended. The threat of an unsatisfactory Ofsted inspection grade, or loss of funding that the setting relies upon to function, could be seen as a penalty to bring the practitioners back into acceptable limits (Foucault, 1977: 183).

This section identified how government surveillance could be perceived through the experiences of the participants in the current study. Government surveillance appeared to be perceived by the participants from a “control and constrain” standpoint (Lyons, 2001: 3). The perceived threat of Ofsted inspections where judgements could translate into penalties appeared to ensure compliance. The following section explores surveillance from a local government angle through the participants’ engagement with Local Authorities (LA).

6.5.2 **Local authority surveillance**

The previous section explored government surveillance through the regulatory body Ofsted. Ofsted's remit also includes the regulation of local education authorities (LA). Therefore, structures have been created within LA's, ensuring that they comply with the regulations. A requirement of the Children Act 2006 was the target for each LA to create a Director of Children's Services and a Lead Member for Children's Services (see 3.7.3) whose primary role was to "address the needs of all children and young people" (DfE, 2013b:5). The current research has demonstrated the variations in how LA's within which the participants function perceived this target. Participants from L2 discussed LA involvement both positively and negatively and could reflect the "two faces of surveillance" discussed by Lyons (2001: 3).

The participants from L2 shared their experiences of the support that they could access positively. The participants shared that the SENC helped to model strategies and set up targets to help the child reach expected levels for their age and stage of development. The participants shared that they had also experienced help with training, accessing funding, and as a critical peer who observed them in practice and provided feedback on ways to improve. From this perspective, the participants' experience of LA surveillance could be perceived as a process of care and protection (Lyons, 2001). Mechanisms of power are not always repressive, and could be seen as vehicles to drive the formation and transformation of knowledge (Foucault, 1977) as appears to be the case in this example.

The findings could, however, be interpreted in an alternative way. Every time the participants communicated with the LA, there was an opportunity to assess what was happening within the participants' setting. Each interaction provided opportunities for the LA to record aspects of practice and progress towards targets to maintain levels of normativity and reflected the other face of surveillance discussed by Lyons (2001: 3) as "constraint and control."

Concerning Foucault's (1977) ideas on panoptical surveillance, these interactions could metaphorically represent the centre of the tower in Bentham's architectural design of the prison building. In the case of this research study, the findings appeared to indicate that panoptical surveillance is identified in the interactions between LA and early years settings that provided representatives from the LA to create a metaphorical tower that moved from setting to setting, in this metaphor the setting represents the cells of the panopticon (Foucault, 1977). The interactions provided the LA representative with opportunities to survey other aspects of provision that may not have been the primary reason for the visit, to see "without being seen" (Deleuze, 2006: 49). The gathering of data could form part of overall surveillance data that feeds back into central government agendas. The emphasis is both on 'watching' from the LA viewpoint and 'being watched' from the practitioners' perspective (Elmer, 2012: 23).

The theme of being watched appeared to be evident when Poppy and Corrie shared their experiences of sending developmental profiles of all children within the setting to the LA. Poppy and Corrie shared that the LA challenged any gaps where children were not meeting expected levels of development against the ELG. The LA could represent what Deleuze (1992) called a control system. Deleuze (1992) suggested that societies of control exercised control without boundaries or limits. The LA request for data could be seen as an example of boundary-crossing to "orchestrate and mobilize" practitioners toward the goal of normativity as there was no legal requirement to provide the data, (Costas, 2012: 378). The goal of normative maintenance could be seen in the comment made by Corrie:

> *the local authority they will then ring me, or someone will come in, and they'll say, this child, this child and this child they're red they're behind**.....** what you doing, why are they behind?* (P14:L2:C)

Corrie's statement seemed to suggest that the expected levels of development are the goal in the search for normativity and controlled by the LA through data monitoring and follow-ups to ensure that practitioners remain

focused on keeping children on track. The LA has the discretion to cease funding for settings achieving an Ofsted grade of “satisfactory” or below providing there is enough other suitable provision within the area (DfE, 2018b). Although there was no direct responsibility for settings to send data to the LA set out in the official documentation, participants within L2 periodically sent data on all the children within the setting about their development levels against each of the ELG. This point was evident in the previous comment by Corrie and a further comment by Poppy who stated, **“***we send all our data to early years* [LA]*, three times a year, and they’ll come back to us and tell us where the gaps are*” (P12:L2:P). The participants’ comments could provide insight when looking at the issue through a panoptical surveillance lens. Through providing the data to the LA without a legal requirement, participants may be unaware that non-complicity is an option. Alternatively, the participants may believe that non-compliance would cause a penalty with the loss of the assistance they appeared to value. Foucault’s (1977: 183) ideas could be interpreted here as a perceived penalty that exists to keep individuals into the realms of acceptability defined by the LA.

The findings could suggest that the participants in the current study are aware of the control of the LA and therefore comply through fear of the potential penalties detailed previously. Control exerted through fear of penalties provided a structure to help bring individuals back into the realms of acceptability and therefore forced compliance (Foucault, 1977), as seen in the example provided in the earlier paragraph. The example above appeared to demonstrate Foucault’s point as only the participants in L2 discussed the need to send data to the LA, suggesting that this is a local level decision rather than a national government instruction, implying that compliance is not mandatory. The compliance from the participants in L2 could, therefore, suggest that they felt compelled to comply with sending data to the LA periodically as demonstrated in Figure 7, where control is exerted from the LA to the individual settings. This point is further emphasised by Corrie who expressed her frustration at being contacted by the LA and stated: *“why can’t that child at two, be slightly behind in one area*?” (P14:L2:C). However, Corrie

still sent the data to the LA at the required time, potentially demonstrating the mechanisms of control that appeared to exist within the setting/LA dynamic to maintain normative levels of child development.

Elmer (2012: 25) suggested that methods used through control and constrain can result in coercive tactics that result in the "misuse of data….collected by surveillance systems." The example provided by the participants could be perceived as coercive if looking at the issue from a panoptical perspective, as a way of ensuring compliance to non-statutory demands. For example, Corrie expressed frustration when receiving calls from the LA about the 'gaps' in children's development profiles; however, she still engaged in sending the data. In this respect, data has become a control mechanism for the setting and individual accountability in ensuring that children achieve the normal/expected levels of development. Data becomes the evidence that is then examined and surveyed to make judgements concerning the setting and or an individual's ability to maintain norms (Foucault, 1977). In this respect, there appeared to be an unwritten contractual agreement providing support in the areas addressed in return for compliance with data surveillance procedures. Foucault (1977: 215, as cited in Elmer, 2012: 25) stated that "discipline…is a type of power…comprising of a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures,… targets…it is an 'anatomy' or power, a technology." Looking at the findings from Foucault's (1977) perspective, the procedures that are created by the LA to monitor goal-orientated targets through data are in themselves the exercise of power through discipline.

The finding could also suggest that the relationship between the LA and the participants has developed a growing dependency. The participants appeared to feel that they required the input of support through the structures discussed and therefore engaged without question to demands made by the LA concerning data. The dependency could indicate forms of control exerted over the settings by the LA to ensure compliance. From the participants' perspective, the formation of their professional discourse concerning professional identity occurs through a series of stages (see 6.3.3). Oliver (2010) stated that from a Foucauldian perspective, a society shapes

individual identity, and an individual reflects the values and beliefs of the society that they operate within. In this scenario, the society is the early years sector of which the LA and government both work, thereby affecting participants' perspectives. The dependency could be seen in this respect as integral to the participants professional identity due to the positivity (unity throughout time) and the archive (the formation and transformation of statements) that created the sectors professional discourse and aided in compliant behaviour (Foucault, 1972: 169). Alternatively, the finding could also be indicative of what Taylor (2009: 47) termed "normalizing the norm." Participants had become so used to sending data to the LA that they no longer questioned or challenged the demand for data.

Conversely, participants from L1 did not appear to value the support received from the LA as positively as participants from L2, suggesting that perhaps their professional discourse differed in places because of geographical location. Although the participants discussed receiving support from a SEYT, there appeared to be a mixed reaction to how valuable they found the advice that was provided (see 5.75.7). The participants shared that they did not have access to training from the LA and internal visits appeared to be less frequent than those provided in L2. Additionally, none of the participants expressed the expectation of sending data to the LA. The finding could suggest that the LA in L1 did not feel the need to survey the progress of the individual children or settings within the location, suggesting different priorities or accountability procedures within that location. The LA appeared to depend on statutory data provided for surveillance at the end of the Foundation Stage (EYFSP) (STA, 2015). Participants within L1 did not appear to view the LA as part of the control system and referred to Ofsted when discussing accountability. The finding appeared to suggest that for participants in L1 the layer between the government and the setting appeared to be absent. The purpose of the LA in L1 appeared to be from a supplementary support perspective with a minimal interest in controlling the maintenance of normative development. In this respect, surveillance measures could be to operate mainly through the face of a "care and protect" perspective (Lyons, 2001: 3). The attainment levels of the children within

both locations could be a factor in the differences between LA approaches. L2 represented a population of predominantly low socioeconomic status, where L1 represented a mixed demographic with varying degrees of socioeconomic status areas. L1 also covered a significantly wider geographical area than L2 and could explain why the response in L2 appeared to be more specified as it could be easier to control and constrain (Lyons, 2001). The finding could also suggest differences in the surveillance measures that the different LA's choose to employ, and this could be due to differences in terms of the political leadership of respective LA's.

This section has explored perceived LA surveillance through the experiences of the participants. The section identified that the participants appeared to view the surveillance measures as serving two purposes. Participants from L2 shared that they felt obliged to send data to the LA despite not agreeing with the request and experienced follow-up calls concerning the children's development levels. The purpose of surveillance, in this case, could be seen from a "control and constrain" standpoint (Lyons, 201: 3). Conversely, participants from L2 also shared that they felt supported by the LA through the various initiatives aimed at helping children to achieve within normative ranges. The purpose of surveillance, in this case, could be seen from a "care and protect" standpoint (Lyons, 2001: 3). The following section explores surveillance from an early years setting perspective.

6.5.3 **Setting management surveillance**

The earlier sections explored panoptical surveillance from the perspective of the government and the local authority. This section explores surveillance from the perspectives of the setting. The previous section made the distinction of the LA as the “watchers” and the participants in their role as practitioners as the “watched” (Elmer, 2012: 23). The following section follows the systems of control identified in section 6.4.1, which highlighted the shift of power throughout the mechanisms. In the following section, the setting managers become the “watchers” and the practitioners remain the “watched” (Elmer, 2012: 23). The shift reflects Foucault’s (1977: 215) discussion on the function of discipline as a “type of power” showing the flow of power throughout the structures within a society.

Participants shared their experiences of tracking and evidencing children’s development through development trackers (see 6.4). Participants discussed development trackers that helped managers within the setting to identify ‘gaps’ in children’s development profiles. Keyleigh discussed the online tool ‘Tapestry’ that provided her as a manager to see colour-coded representations of a cohort of children. Keyleigh explained that “*red”* means that the child was “*below”* the expected levels of development, and this would prompt a conversation with the child’s key worker to identify why there were gaps. Keyleigh, in her role as a manager, appeared to have become a watcher and has used the tracker as a system of surveillance through which to identify key workers whose children are not meeting expected levels of development. Here, the findings could illustrate, as Deleuze (2006) suggested, that the panopticon has shifted in Keyleigh’s example to impose specific conduct on the practitioners she manages.

Similarly, the examples provided by other participants appeared to highlight the use of surveillance as a system for control. Chloe was a deputy manager and a SENDCo and stated: ***“****we’ll speak to the members of staff and say you know ‘can you justify why you put in there what evidence is there*?”

(P9:L1:C). The participants also discussed judging their colleagues' abilities in using the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). Sometimes, where the participants were managers or SENDCos, their job description included policing to ensure the compliance of colleagues within the setting as demonstrated in Figure 7. Here, the participants' role formed part of the system of control towards achieving normativity. Once the individuals within a society accepted the rules, the statements and the themes created a shared understanding of normativity, they actively worked towards controlling themselves and others within the society, aiding the society of control as discussed by Deleuze (1992). Control is exerted through several mechanisms including the early years curriculum, assessment procedures, national and local policies and procedures and individual setting policies and procedures, to achieve normativity.

Bentham's vision of the panopticon design that segregated the prison guards symbolised a system used to govern others became a prison in itself (Elmer, 2012: 23). Applying this metaphor to the current study could suggest that the manager's role within the early years setting can become isolated through control procedures (Deleuze, 2006). The focus on evidence to validate an assessment decision speaks to the accountability culture that appeared to have been born through the creation, maintenance and surveillance of normative development. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) emphasised that the focus on data-driven practices to validate children's development could conversely invalidate the data collected through apprehension and fear. Elmer (2012: 25) also made this point and suggested that control and constraint measures may result in coercive tactics that "result out of the misuse of data… collected by surveillance systems." This viewpoint may explain the results of the current study. Participants shared that they felt pressured to ensure that children's profiles had data on all areas of learning within the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). Freya discussed that her setting instructed her to ensure that she identified at least three ELG's within written observations. Freya's statement may indicate that she felt as if she had to make sure she identified three ELG, so the reporting process was more relevant than the information recorded. The finding could show that Freya felt coerced to

comply with collecting data that could be invalidated because of a forced focus on ELG's that may not be evident during the child observation. The finding could support the view that due to a perceived expectation in L2 to provide data on all ELG's for all children by the LA, has created a response which as Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) highlighted, can affect judgement. The finding suggested that the need to comply with surveillance procedures exceeds the trepidation felt by participants relating to their professional judgement through power exerted through discipline (Foucault, 1977: 215).

This section has highlighted how surveillance at the setting management level can be applied to both Bentham's perspective of "watching" and Foucault's perspective of "being watched" (Elmer, 2012: 23). Through compliance with national and local government agenda's, the setting manager appeared to be placed in the situation of either 'watching' colleagues to ensure compliance with guidance to 'being watched' by the LA or Ofsted. The following section explores how the participants in the current study surveyed both themselves and their colleagues.

6.5.4 **Self-governance and surveillance of colleagues**

The previous section explored surveillance measures exerted from management within the early years setting. The following section focuses on self-surveillance and the surveillance of colleagues. Foucault (1977) referred to self-surveillance as self-governance. Elmer (2012: 24) discussed Foucault's work on "self-governance" stating that discipline "cultivates…an automatic subservience, without the need for direct monitoring and management." Foucault (1977:109, as cited in Elmer, 2012: 24), determined that self-governance aided efficiency and stated:

> panopticism, is the discipline mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come.

The subtle coercion discussed by Foucault (1977) referred to the act of self-governance. Participants in the current study shared their experiences of self-governance showing compliance (see 6.3). As addressed in this chapter's discourse section, participants' emphasis on training demonstrated their encouragement for self-governance in sustaining normative development levels. Many participants, (except for two), had either earned a degree or were working towards a degree at the time of the interview. Several participants addressed their motivation to participate in training to ensure they could help the children. Participants also appeared to perceive colleagues who did not want to pursue additional CPD opportunities negatively and used this lack of motivation to judge their competency as a practitioner. This could be seen as a subtle form of coercion that communicates values through discourse that is then taken on and projected through the governance of self and others (Foucault, 1977). Coercion appeared to be evident in a comment made by Chloe, who indicated that colleagues she worked with "*hadn't* got *that enhanced knowledge*" (P9:L1:C) and therefore could not accurately identify or support children with SLCN. Chloe appeared to be suggesting that she perceived CPD as valuable and was perhaps influenced by the discursive statements communicated within the professional discourse that advocated for CPD as an essential component to professional identity. The finding could also indicate as Foucault (1977) pointed out that once normativity levels are accepted, individuals use this as a basis for monitoring and surveying their behaviour and others' actions, as in Chloe's example.

The participants also shared experiences where they appeared to judge the work ethic of colleagues with whom they worked. Ayla stated that some colleagues she worked with expressed: "*I can't be bothered today*," (P13:L2:A) when asked to support children. Similarly, Megan referred to colleagues as "*lazy*." The finding, when explored through the lens of self-governance, could be seen as the cultured response of "subservience" (Foucault, 1977: 109). Through this lens, the participants could appear to have accepted the values of discourse that provided the "criteria" through

which actions are judged as “good, worthwhile, desirable or…..bad, worthless or despicable” (Shaver & Strong, 1976:15 as cited in Halstead, 1996: 6).

Self - governance appeared to be evident in the discussions surrounding the participants’ assessments of children. All participants expressed frustration at the expected assessment tool (EYFS, DfE, 2012b); however, they continued to use the tool despite feeling it was flawed. This point was evident mainly when the conversations turned to children identified as having a SEND or EAL; Ayla’s comment that a child she was working with appeared to be “*underachieving”* and although she felt that he was not underachieving, Ayla still used the tool to comply, indicating self-governance. The participants appeared to be saying that although they did not agree with pushing children towards specified targets, they felt compelled to do so, showing “subservience” (Foucault, 1977:109). The finding resonates with Foucault’s (1977) ideas of self-governance, indicating that the values within the discourse are so strong, although individuals recognise flaws and limitations of the concepts within the discourse, they felt compelled to comply.

This section explored the processes that the participants in the current study seemed to engage in to self-govern their behaviour towards complying with government guidance. The section also explored how the participant’s perceived their colleagues when they appeared to hold different values to the participant’s potentially demonstrating the surveillance in an attempt to control or coerce colleagues behaviour in a desirable direction (Beniger (2009).

6.6 Summary

This section has explored Foucault’s thoughts on discourse formation through the three stages of discursive formation, positivity and archive (Sawyer, 2002). Foucault’s (1972) ideas on discourse formation were applied to the current study by exploring how the participants appeared to perceive their professional identities examined through the early years professional discourse. The section identified that for the participants, CPD

appeared to be an essential aspect of how they examined their professionalism and the professionalism of their colleagues. The importance of CPD concerning professional identity appeared to have transformed over the past twenty years through changing values as a result of research (Sylva et al. 2004) and government focus (Mathers et al. 2011; Nutbrown, 2012).

The chapter explored Foucault's (1977) reflections on the processes of normalisation as an aspect of control within a society. The section identified and defined the key terms of norms, normativity and normalisation. Taylor (2009: 47) outlined that through unchallenged systematically repeated behaviours classified as acceptable or unacceptable, a process of normalisation occurred. The process of "normalising norms" enabled subjects to become efficient in specific practices. In this respect, Taylor (2009: 47) argued that "normalizing norms" encouraged subjects to become highly efficient at performing a narrowly defined range of practices and hindered transformation and change. The chapter concluded that Taylor's (2009) and Foucault's (1977) ideas could be applied to the current study where participants appeared to accept aspects of their work, such as assessing children using the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) against any reservations that they might have.

The final section of the chapter explored Foucault's (1977) work on the function of discipline and punishment through surveillance procedures. Foucault's (1977) illustration of the use of penalties as a method of control was explored and applied in the discussions relating to government surveillance through Ofsted regulations. Conclusions were made that the fear of Ofsted who had the power to withhold funding through the grading system could be seen as a penalty that assured conformity (DfE, 2018b).

The section also identified that Foucault (1977) did not perceive power as inherently negative. Surveillance measures as a form of control could be seen to both "constrain and control" and to "care and protect" (Lyons, 2011: 3). The chapter concluded that both forms of surveillance appeared to be evident within the current study, where the participants discussed the fear of

penalties from Ofsted. The fear of penalties may have been a factor for participants in L2 concerning the LA request for data, however, this was not explicitly stated by participants, it appeared to be implied on occasions. The care and protection side of surveillance appeared evident in the discussions by participants from L2 who discussed the support they received from the LA in positive ways. Support from the LA could be perceived from a care and protection perspective. However, the section highlighted that perhaps, the LA support could also be seen from a control and constraint angle as the increased opportunities for engagement from setting to LA perspective, increased the opportunities for surveillance that could serve both “care and protect” and “constraint and control” purposes.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate early years practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), in early years settings. I wanted to find out what it was like to be a practitioner with the responsibility of supporting children with identified SLCN. The literature provided an opportunity to explore where the research fit within the existing body of knowledge and helped to develop my values and beliefs concerning the topic. I found that speech and language development as an area of research was positioned between health and education services (RCSLT, 2014 & 2017; DfE, 2015). I drew on studies by speech and language therapists and scholars who provided a basis to ground my understanding of how children's normative language development is calculated (Bates et al. 1994; Rescorla & Alley, 2001; MacRoy-Higgins et al. 2016). This literature was helpful in gaining understanding of the challenges experienced by the practitioners in the current study as they attempted to identify SLCN in young children. Research by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016 & 2017) into the use of assessment to support data-driven practices was also helpful in understanding the stories and experiences shared by practitioners. The literature also helped to provide a background of how the discourse of professional development has evolved over time that now recognises practitioners as both educators and carers for children in the early years (Roberts-Holmes, 2012). The emphasis on the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) as a tool for assessing children's development by practitioners in the current study, provided insight into how complex their role is in making assessment decisions regarding children's development that is based upon a "value prism" (Dubiel, 2016: 91). Assessment decisions that ultimately placed children into the categories of "emerging, expected or exceeding" within each early learning goal (Glazzard, 2014).

The literature helped to analyse and understand the tensions practitioners are faced with concerning their own professional identity within the early

years sector. When explored within Foucault's (1972) vision of discourse formation, it became clear that the professional identity of practitioners may still be forming as they begin to resist and challenge some of the societal and politically held assumptions about their role (Whitters, 2017). The practitioners shared their experiences of balancing the expectations placed upon them and discussed how they attempted to work within the expectations and limitations of the local authorities in the areas they worked. Early years practitioners may need to consider their professional roles and the expectations placed upon them and reflect on how these expectations impact their practice. Practitioners may need to be a little braver in coming forward to challenge (or resist) aspects of their role that they do not agree with to prevent situations becoming normal or accepted without question (Taylor, 2009).

The following chapter summarises the contributions made within this thesis. I return to the research aim and the research questions. I explore the implications that the findings of the current study have for both practice and policy. I identify areas of study that could be explored arising from the findings of the current research that highlighted areas that this research could lead. The limitations of the current research are identified and how these limitations may have impacted the findings of this research. I end by exploring my contribution to knowledge from a personal and professional perspective.

7.1 Returning to the research question

The following section returns to the four research questions that shaped the current study. The questions have provided a structure throughout the thesis that has guided the study design and helped to answer the research aim: To investigate early years practitioners' experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified speech, language and communication needs, in early years settings. There is an extensive exploration of the questions throughout the thesis. Therefore, this section acts as an overview of each question. The final question: "What are the differences and similarities in experiences

between early years practitioners in two different counties?" is addressed within the first three questions where applicable.

1. What are the experiences of early years practitioners in relation to the identification process of speech language and communication needs in two-year-old children?

The practitioners discussed the identification process of SLCN in children concerning qualifications and training and the tools used for assessment. All practitioners discussed the tools used to identify speech language and communication needs (SLCN), and this is addressed within the next question.

The practitioners specifically discussed the training as a factor in the identification of SLCN. Practitioners expressed that they did not feel the qualifications they had taken completely supported their understanding of SLD to a point where they felt secure in recognising SLCN. One practitioner began as an apprentice and stated that she had received no training to support her understanding of child development. This finding resonates with Hall's (2005) research which found that some courses do not adequately prepare practitioners to assess, identify and support young children's language development. There were challenges in accessing SENDCo training in one location where the practitioner was in post for eighteen months without having received the SENDCo training and subsequently left the setting. Where the training was received, the focus appeared to be on documentation rather than identification and support.

Attending training was a factor for many practitioners who felt that there was an increased expectation to self-fund training. Self-funding training is problematic because of the low-pay of the sector. Also, releasing practitioners to attend training can cause additional challenges for settings because of government-stipulated adult: child ratios that can mean that practitioners rely on online courses that may not fully support their understanding of speech and language development. These factors can affect the motivation for practitioners to engage in CPD. The local authority in location 2 eased this challenge by offering tailor-made training in early years

settings that took place after hours on the premises, but this was not consistent across locations. Through exploring the practitioners' experiences of training from the conceptual framework, it appeared that training had become one of the mechanisms discussed by Foucault to control the early years sector. Engagement with CPD opportunities provided ways to ensure that practitioners endorsed the expectations set by the government concerning the assessment of children. In this way, normativity could be maintained with little resistance as development levels were accepted as "science" (Ball, 2012).

From alternative Foucauldian perspective, the practitioners were expected to maintain and support normative levels of development through the identification of SLCN. Identification became a process of categorisation that sought to highlight those children not meeting the expected levels of development. The process of identification therefore provided opportunities for categorisation that sought to "fix and repair divergence from the norms" (Ball 2012: 100).

Practitioners discussed the value of learning from experience and the colleagues with whom they worked. In the absence of training, this approach appeared to be where the practitioners honed their skills. However, Evie highlighted that because of the adult: child ratios, the practitioners time to support one another or less experienced members of staff was limited. The situation was further exasperated when staff are absent due to sickness or high staff turn-over.

2. *What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are assessed?*

The process of assessment was a key focus of the experiences shared by practitioners. The main findings of assessment were ambiguity and subjectivity of the primary tool used by early years practitioners to assess children; tracking children's development and the pressure to collect data and be held accountable for children's development levels.

The primary tool used by the practitioners in the current study was the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). The practitioners struggled with using the EYFS to identify SLCN due to the subjective nature of the assessment tool. Practitioners discussed that they had received no formal training to use the EYFS and made assessment decisions based on “best fit” (DfE, 2013a: 3) decisions. The practitioners highlighted that different practitioners see different things when assessing children based upon previous experiences and training and therefore, did not consider the assessment results to be reliable. This argument was further demonstrated when settings managers questioned practitioners’ assessment decisions because they did not seem to match the child’s development profile.

Development was continuously monitored against the ELG to ensure that children were assisted to achieve the expected development levels for their age. Practitioners stated that they felt pressured to assess children when they did not feel the assessments fully reflected the child’s ability. Practitioners felt the child was sometimes assessed as underperforming due to unrealistic expectations. From a conceptual perspective, assessments form the basis from which to judge normativity. Normativity in this sense can also be viewed as acceptability. Those children assessed as not meeting normative measures, can be categorised as requiring additional support and having a special educational need or disability (SEND). The term SEND provides a label that can be understood that identifies and categorises the child to be outside of accepted educational attainment.

The practitioners discussed that assessments converted into data sets that identified the children’s development against ELGs. The data was used by setting managers and by the local authority in location two as an accountability measure. Practitioners discussed the need to justify the children’s development level with a focus on supporting children to achieve within the expected range of development. Foucault discussed this in his observations concerning surveillance. Surveillance can provide either support or constraint (Lyons, 2001), both appeared to be evident within the current study. Practitioners justified assessment decisions to managers, Ofsted and in Location 2 to the local authority, and appeared to fear reprisal

to the extent that they were constantly mindful of assessing children and collecting ‘evidence’ to support their decisions.

Practitioners shared that there were other tools available to support children; however, there was minimal consistency across settings or geographical location in the tools that were used.

3. *What are the experiences of early years practitioners concerning how speech, language and communication needs are supported?*

The support processes available for children varied across location and different practitioners. The support processes were where the differences in the data sets between the locations appeared to be the most significant. The support available could be viewed from a range of perspectives; internal support, external support divided between the local authority and speech and language therapy services.

The practitioners discussed the internal support concerning the strategies they put in place to support children. However, the practitioners highlighted that it was difficult to support children’s individual needs due to the government-stipulated ratio’s that made it a challenge to carry out individual interventions. Government funding for individual children eased the pressure in some cases; however, one practitioner stated that the funding did not always help in ensuring the child received interventions due to staff shortages.

Where possible, practitioners were encouraged to disseminate the training that they had attended to colleagues. However, this again was challenging due to the limitation of time available. Practitioners also suggested that they felt aggrieved that the settings used the training they had self-funded and attended in their own time.

The support available in the settings the practitioners worked in ranged from setting to setting and between locations. Support available from the local

authority appeared to be higher in location 2 than location 1 with bespoke training, different advisors to support children and settings with varying needs who were readily available either by phone, email or in person. Support in location 1 mainly focused on children over three through a qualified early years teacher. Sometimes, practitioners from location 1 stated the support was readily available, and others stated that sometimes they had to wait weeks for a visit.

The support from speech and language therapy services varied across location. Speech and language therapy services in location 2 offered specific training for practitioners and carers to support the child, ensuring a coordinated approach to intervention. Speech and language therapy services also carried out visits in the practitioners setting and involved them in the interventions for the child.

Practitioners from location 1 said visits from speech and language therapy services were minimal, with many saying they had not encountered an speech and language visiting any of the settings they had worked within. The practitioners from location 1 stated that the speech and language therapy response to referrals was to send out a standardised letter to the child's parent. There was mainly no contact between speech and language therapy and the practitioners. Practitioners stated that children had often left the setting to go to school before any interventions began.

The practitioners within location 2 provided a mixed response to the speech and language therapy referral process. The response was mixed due to a transition in the process during the time the interviews were conducted. Previously, practitioners discussed that speech and language therapy referrals were accepted by the time the child was two-years-old. The child would receive a triage appointment six months later and then begin intervention if needed six months after the triage appointment, suggesting the child would be three when they first received interventions. In the meantime, groups were set up in children's centres to support the child's language development that formed part of the referral process. The changes indicated

that the triage part of the process had changed to a tick box form at different chronological ages to indicate the child's level of speech and language development. Unless most of the boxes could be completed, the referral would not go through. Practitioners suggested the changes meant that children were often in school before any interventions could take place. The finding could explain why so many children appear to be starting school without the level of language skills needed to fully access the curriculum (Law et al. 2017).

The findings could also be viewed conceptually. The government have provided tools and processes to assess children to maintain normative levels and to identify children who do not fit expected developmental levels. The aim of identification is to "fix and repair divergence from the norms" (Ball, 2012: 100). Support forms part of the process to meet this aim, however, there appears to be a dissonance between what support is needed and who is responsible for providing the support. Government funding is not consistently accessible across settings or locations and this has added to the challenges faced by practitioners.

7.2 Implications for policy and practice

Early years practitioners are in the unique position of supporting children's development from birth to five years old. The changes within the sector from care focused to an education and care focus (Roberts-Holmes, 2012) has created challenges for practitioners in balancing their professional role between supporting children's personal, social and emotional development and education (Bertram & Pascal, 2002).

The implications of this change have resulted in practitioners redefining their professional identity and their role as carer and educator (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015). Lightfoot and Frost (2015) argued that practitioners struggled to define professionalism within the sector. The findings from the current study identified that many (13/15) of the practitioners related their professional identities to their engagement with CPD opportunities, suggesting that for the

participants in the current study, CPD and professionalism are inextricably linked.

Although education has been a focus for practitioners for many years, the increased attention on children's development levels has added pressure (Bradbury, 2019). Introducing the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008b) as a flexible curriculum for children from birth to five years old to monitor development against was intended as a framework of guidance (DCSF; 2008b; Roberts-Holmes, 2012). The intention was to support children's development throughout their early years by creating ages and stages of development that were not fixed. The EYFS (DCSF, 2008b) created a chain of developments in early years curriculum design that has resulted in a greater emphasis on children's achievement at specific development points (Pascal et al. 2019). The focus from a flexible curriculum to support children's interests and development rates appears to have transitioned into a model that focuses on all children achieving "expected" levels of development at specific developmental periods (Glazzard, 2014). This was evidenced in the current study where practitioners in the current study reported feeling pressure to know the development levels of their key children, the pressure to ensure that all children are working at the "expected" level of development and pressure to produce data.

The EYFS (DfE, 2012b) as a tool to assess children's speech and language development appeared to be used inconsistently across practitioners, settings and the geographical area within the current study. Practitioners discussed the lack of training on how to use the tool added to the ambiguity of how the tool was applied by different practitioners, potentially suggesting that assessments using the EYFS are not robust or consistent. This finding could suggest that any data collected could be potentially misleading and ambiguous and supports previous findings (Brooker et al. 2010). This finding is important because the data is used by settings and sometimes, the LA to determine the levels of children's language development within an area.

7.2.1 Implications of the assessment and identification of SLCN for policy and practice

The literature identified that there is no consistent guidance ground in research for normative language development. Normative development is determined by establishing averages from a cohort of children (Armstrong, 1995). Normative language measures are calculated using averages from a study cohort (Bates et al. 1994; Rescorla & Alley, 2001; MacRoy-Higgins et al. 2016). The literature highlighted that while many studies on children's vocabulary ranges were performed at various developmental points, no two studies obtained consistent findings and showed "massive variability" (Bates et al. 1994:94). Each of the studies explored in the literature for the current study had a different median word ranging from 185-350 words (Bates et al. 1994; Rescorla & Alley, 2001; MacRoy-Higgins et al. 2016). The tool most commonly used by practitioners to assess children's language is the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). Within the EYFS under the Communication and Language area of learning in the speaking ELG for children aged between 16-26 months, the guidance is vague and does not refer to vocabulary range. There appears to be a disconnect between how research measures language and how this is interpreted within the policy guidance. The practitioners in the current study expressed that the ELG's in the EYFS (DfE. 2012b) was not specific enough, and they did not feel that they could confidently assess children's language skills using the EYFS. However, practitioners appeared to accept the EYFS as an assessment tool and in many cases, as the only assessment tool. My hope moving forward is to be an advocate to encourage practitioners to adopt a more critical approach to their role. To question aspects of their practice that they are uncomfortable with and that they feel does not benefit the children with whom they work.

Concerning defining rates of normative speech and language development, the policy guidance does not seem to align with research into what language levels would look like at different ages. This lack of consistency can make it difficult for practitioners when identifying SLCN that rely upon external

measurements for referrals.

The differences in how normative development is defined can also contribute to the identification of special educational needs in the primary area of communication and language (DfE, 2015). The ELG is used to track the language development of children. Children who persistently fail to achieve ELG's in communication and language may be considered to have a special educational need (DfE, 2015). I discuss the use of labelling at length within this thesis (Norwich, 2014; Algraigray & Boyle, 2017), and I refer back to the previous paragraph that highlights the variability of children's vocabulary ranges at different chronological ages. The significance of this is that children could incorrectly receive an SEND label or conversely not receive additional support when it is needed.

There are broader implications here concerning the normalisation of children's speech and language development that draws on the discussion in 2.5.1 of the purpose of education. The current education system requires children to achieve specific skills at specific times to access the next stage of education in this case, primary school. A more comprehensive discussion and research on the apparent inflexibility of each stage of education that requires particular skills from children at specific times that may ultimately impact on the child's ability to achieve may be helpful.

The practitioners in the current study appeared to focus on the pressure to ensure that children were all working at the expected level of development for each ELG. The expected level of development refers to the children who are achieving the level of development for their chronological age (Glazzard, 2014). When children were not meeting this level, the practitioners reported being questioned by managers and the local authority to find out why and what the practitioners intended to do about it. This push towards all children achieving a standardised level of development at specific ages suggests that the early years curriculum has gone through a normalisation process. The practitioners discussed actively endorsing this process through interventions that sought to ensure that children were achieving the acceptable level for

the ELG, despite feeling uncomfortable that children's abilities were not recognised against the EYFS framework (DfE, 2012b).

This finding has implications for both policy and practice. The EYFS (DfE, 2012b) was initially intended as a flexible curriculum to guide practitioners and is evidenced by the curriculum design. Interpretation of the EYFS appears to have evolved and taken on new meaning. The curriculum is used by Ofsted during inspections to decide on the quality of the setting (Ofsted, 2019). The Ofsted judgement holds power concerning the grading of the setting that can impact whether the setting can continue operating. This power is communicated to practitioners who discuss the comments made by Ofsted inspectors with one another and with practitioners from other settings. Practice is then adapted to ensure that the practitioners comply with the published guidance and the unofficial guidance they have shared, potentially leading to miscommunication in how the EYFS should be used to support children's learning.

Children's development is consistently tracked and monitored by the settings using development trackers that identify children who are not at the expected level and sometimes this data is sent through to the local authority. The findings from the current study appear to resonate with the study by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2017) in relation to tracking children's development procedures by the local authority. The danger of tracking data for government purposes is that the data can obscure the meaning for collecting the data as the focus becomes about the data rather than the child's development. This also relates to Foucault's thoughts on surveillance that acknowledges once an ideology has become accepted, surveillance structures begin to form within the society to support and maintain the structure. I evidenced this point in the current study when Freya discussed aiming to assess three ELG's in each written observation. The implications for policy are concerned with what the curriculum is used for and how it is used. The original intended application of the EYFS (DfE, 2015) seems to have evolved from a guidance curriculum to a focus on enforcing normative levels of development for children. The new release of the EYFS (DfE, 2018c) may clarify these issues;

however, early signs indicate that accountability and emphasis on academic skills appear to have increased (Pascal et al. 2019). This has implications for practice and practitioners need to be critically aware of the structures that they operate within to ensure that the children's best interests are at the forefront of all practice decisions.

The findings could show that a more robust system such as the Wellcomm tool is needed for practitioners to assess children's language levels. The Wellcomm tool appeared to more closely align with the tool used by speech and language therapists (PLS-4) in determining children's language levels practitioners of varying abilities can use. Seager and Abbot-Smith (2017) found that this tool was more accurate in identifying language levels in children than the EYFS; however, it is noted that settings are required to purchase this tool, and this may not be feasible during the current economic climate. It is also important to note that more research is needed to confirm Seager and Abbot-Smiths (2017) results; however, one participant in the current study, also reported success with this tool.

7.2.2 **Implications of supporting children with SLCN**

The practitioners discussed supporting children with SLCN from two perspectives: internally and externally. The practitioners reflected on their skills developed through training and experience. In the current climate, practitioners discussed that training opportunities were not as freely available as it had been in the past. Participants from location 1 discussed the need to self-fund and source their training to develop their skills to help support the children.

Practitioners from location 2 shared that they had access to training opportunities, although at a reduced rate to what they had enjoyed in the past. The practitioners all appeared to have positive regard for CPD and expressed their pride at the training they had already undertaken. However, training for speech and language development was not consistent, and many of the practitioners from both locations suggested that they would welcome

more opportunities to develop their skills in this area. The finding suggests that a more consistent approach to speech and language training would be welcomed.

The practitioners discussed the strategies they used to support children with identified SLCN. Practitioners from location 2 used strategies that were suggested by local authority support teams and speech and language therapy services and found this useful. Practitioners from location 1 used strategies that they had mainly witnessed through experiences of working with specific children. Practitioners from both locations discussed the challenges of supporting children because of government-stipulated ratios that meant that they could not work on an individualised basis with children where needed unless the child received additional funding. In many cases, funding was not always possible, and this made it challenging for the participants to support the child in the way that they would like. The challenges were compounded by the current sector issues relating to sustainability because of the 30-hour funding (Parkes, 2017) and the low staffing levels due to staff sickness and turnover (Gaunt, 2018c; McAlees, 2019).

The external support available for the practitioners to access between the two locations was one of the most significant findings in the current study. Practitioners in location 2 appeared to access more support from the local authority and SLT services than practitioners in location 1. This finding could be due to how services and funding are organised and distributed in these areas (Parish & Bryant, 2015; DfE, 2018b). However, this may benefit from further research to explore how different local authorities organise support, and the impact support might have for settings and the children.

7.3 Next step for research in this area.

The previous section identified the implications of the current study for practice and policy. Throughout this thesis threads have emerged that have provided questions or suggested areas that might be researched further. In

Chapters five and six the challenges of identification through assessment were discussed. This section explores some suggestions for how this research might lead on to further research to help address the challenges this thesis has uncovered. The disparities in the support services available across the locations is another finding that I discuss in the following section, and I suggest that further research into how support is organised, prioritised and distributed may be needed.

The narratives of the practitioners highlighted the differences in how the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) was used to assess children's development. Practitioners discussed the variability in assessments carried out using the EYFS that identified children's development as either emerging, expected or exceeding within each ELG (Glazzard, 2014). Further research into how the application of the EYFS and the factors that influence assessment decisions may provide a greater understanding of how children's speech and language development are assessed. The implications of this may reduce children misidentified in each category that highlights (or no) children who may need additional support through interventions.

The study by Seager and Abbott (2017) compared practitioners' assessments of children's speech and language development using the Wellcomm Toolkit and the EYFS with the results compared to the PLS-4, the tool used by SLT. Further research may provide a richer understanding to support practitioners' assessments of children's language development in order to either improve assessments through the EYFS or explore alternative assessment opportunities. This research could then provide a link to how training might be developed for practitioners to ensure a consistent approach to the identification, assessment and support of SLCN.

Practitioners discussed the feeling of pressure from Ofsted and the LA to ensure that children were supported towards expected levels of development followed through development trackers designed to identify gaps (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016; Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017). This pressure may influence the assessment decisions of practitioners concerning the

development levels of the children with whom they work. Research by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) highlighted that the push towards data-driven practices could cause apprehension and fear leading to inaccuracies in the data collected. Further research into how the local authority uses data might help to provide greater understanding for practitioners of the purpose data serves. Alternatively, the research could help to explore the impact that data demands have on practitioners and children in terms of anxiety and the quality and accuracy of the data collected. I hope that this finding opens up a dialogue between practitioners and the local authority to explore this issue.

The practitioners in the current study also identified the challenges of supporting children with identified SLCN. Practitioners stated that because of staff shortages, the difficulty in securing government funding reduced access to specialised training and trying to support children within government-stipulated ratios made it challenging to provide effective interventions to improve outcomes for children. There are four main challenges here, all worthy of further research.

Government funding is limited, and during the current economic climate, this issue is unlikely to be resolved in the near future, however, there may be some areas that could benefit from further exploration. Practitioners from location 1 suggested that if they had more guidance from working in collaboration with speech and language therapy services may reduce some of this pressure as demonstrated by practitioners in location 2; this may reduce the need for additional training. Time to carry out interventions due to staff shortages and ratios could be explored as a potential area for further research to identify strategies that might help to alleviate this.

The final area for further research that I would like to identify goes back to where this project first began. I initially identified the involvement of parents to explore their experiences of supporting children with SLCN. It became apparent that including parents, split the focus of the study and therefore, I reflected and changed the study design. I believe research involving parent

experiences of supporting children with SLCN would provide an additional understanding and dimension to this research.

7.4 Limitations of this study

The design of this study was small scale. There were fifteen practitioners, and I continued to recruit until I was confident that I had achieved saturation in the responses of the participants. The participants' experiences were rich and provided detailed insights through their shared experiences that provided a small window into what it felt like for them to be a practitioner supporting two-year-old children with identified SLCN. However, I acknowledge that this study cannot be generalised.

The study involved two geographical locations, and the responses of the participants may not fully represent the experiences of the participants from either their geographical area or from a national perspective.

The fifteen participants that were involved in the study came forward voluntarily and therefore may have felt strongly about the research topic at the time of the interviews, and this might have influenced their responses.

The conversational interviews captured how the practitioners felt at the moment of the interview by asking them to reflect on experiences. I believe that these reflections captured the initial thoughts of the practitioners as they examined their experience in light of the conversation, providing an honest response to how they felt in that moment (Webster & Mertova, 2007). However, had the practitioners had more time to reflect on their experiences, they might have provided different answers.

The study design involved one interview, and the data were analysed based on my interpretation of this interview that lasted for a minimum of 24 minutes to a maximum of 68 minutes. The interview length may have impacted the depth of the responses provided by practitioners.

The interview location may have influenced the responses that were received, particularly with Ruby, who was a child-minder and caring for children during our interview. However, I believe this was also a strength of the interview because in many instances the practitioners used these triggers to facilitate and stimulate conversation.

The interpretation of the data is my own, and I acknowledge that another researcher with differing experiences may interpret the data differently. To try and minimise this limitation, I invited the practitioners where possible to check my interpretations. However, I also acknowledge that in my role as a researcher, the practitioners may not have felt wholly comfortable correcting my interpretation.

The approach to the data collection was a conversational interview where my experiences were shared throughout the conversation, and I acknowledge that this may have led the participants. However, I believe that the approach stimulated the rich discussions that followed it and made the experience less interview like, making the practitioners relax and engage in the dialogue that aided authenticity (Roulston, 2012).

At the time of the interviews, the early years sector was experiencing challenges relating to sustainability through austerity measures that were reflected in cuts to services and support (Lewis & West, 2017). Such factors may have influenced how the practitioners felt in the time leading up to the interview. While the responses created rich data, participants also shared concerns about their working situation as expressed in their responses relating to supporting the children.

7.5 My contribution to knowledge

This study has illuminated the experiences of early years practitioners of supporting children identified with speech, language and communication needs. The study provided insight into some challenges practitioners face as they balance statutory and non-statutory guidance while navigating the

practicalities of supporting children to achieve expected levels of development. The literature helped to position the current research that identified the inconsistencies of how normative language is defined (Bates et al. 1994; Rescorla and Alley, 2001; MacRoy-Higgins et al. 2016) and highlighted the demanding role of the practitioners as they balance data-driven practices (Roberts-Homes & Bradbury, 2016) while aiming to support the children for whom they cared. This theoretical grounding provided opportunities to shape the research design that led me to the work of Labov and Waletzky's (1967, cited in Esin, 2011) and Somers (1994) to create a hybrid from their narrative frameworks. This framework, guided by the principles of narrative inquiry (Connolly & Clandinin, 2006) enabled me to illuminate the experiences of the practitioners in the study. The frustration experienced by the practitioners at what they perceived to be a lack of funding, training and support for their roles in supporting the children for whom they work was evident. The contributions to knowledge can be summarised as:

- Understanding the challenges faced by practitioners in assessing children's development using the EYFS (DFE, 2012b).
- Understanding the impact and value of training in supporting and underpinning practitioners' knowledge and understanding of language development.
- The need to make the links between research and policy identified language development levels more aligned to aid cohesion between early years practice and speech and language services.
- Understanding the role of data and how data-driven practices may increase pressure and compromise the integrity of the data collected.
- Understanding the value of external support available for early years practitioners to access for advice, training and guidance across all local authorities to reduce a postcode lottery for support services.
- Understanding the drive to maintain normativity through expected levels of development.
- Acknowledging that surveillance provides multifaceted layers that can provide either support or constraint. Practitioners need to be

consciously aware of both sides of surveillance and their legal and moral responsibility towards supporting children.

- Understanding the structures that influence practitioners to self-survey their own actions against prescribed criteria that aids the overall agenda of controlling normativity

7.5.1 Contribution to personal knowledge

I began this journey thinking I was investigating and supporting early intervention for speech, language and communication needs in children from two-years-old. My previous research had highlighted the value of early intervention in supporting children's language development to improve long-term outcomes for children (Nicholson & Palaiologou, 2016). As a practitioner and as a mother, I had experienced first-hand the impact of SLCN on children's attainment and mental health, and this became the motivator for the current study. As a practitioner, I witnessed the cuts to services that made interventions challenging and noticed that interventions were being delayed. My experiences highlighted that children once able to receive interventions from two-years-old were being postponed until three years old, and the current study appeared to indicate that interventions were being postponed until four-years-old.

This finding was not a surprise and I had expected to find this; however, what I had not fully anticipated was that through engaging in this research, my perspective would change. The findings of the study continuously surprised me concerning all the issues raised by this research. The differences between geographical areas were not something I had expected to find, and the drive of the practitioners humbled me in continuing to develop their skills as practitioners by overcoming so many obstacles. However, the most significant impact came during the analysis of the findings using the conceptual framework.

I was expecting to advocate for early intervention so that children could join a school at the same level as their peers and fully access the curriculum. The

analysis through the conceptual framework made me examine this from a different perspective, and I became uncomfortable. Ball (2012: 2) discussed his own journey into Foucault as a “struggle and a shock.” I had a similar experience I realised that I had been viewing the child as in need of support, in need of ‘fixing.’ I realised that as a practitioner and a mother, I had purposively influenced children towards a “predetermined goal” (Beniger, 2009) believing this to be supporting the child. I reflected that I wanted the children to be ‘normal’ and join the other ‘normal’ children without stopping to reflect along the way, of what that means. In essence, I was seeking to ‘fix’ the child rather than to accept the child and celebrate their abilities. I had been part of perpetuating the process or ‘normalising the norm’ (Taylor, 2009: 47) through my role as mother, practitioner and now as an educator. Ball (2012: 88) discussed that following his engagement with Foucault, he felt it necessary “rewrite himself” concerning his previously held conceptions. This is a process that I am currently engaged within. I have reflected upon the role of education and the structure of education and come to acknowledge that the reason children would benefit from achieving individual skills at specific ages, is to join a socially constructed education system, that does not allow for differences in learning abilities or speeds. Through this research, I am reflecting on my values, and I see the world differently. This contribution to my knowledge is already impacting how I share and exchange knowledge in personal and professional ways.

7.6 Summary

The practitioners in this study shared their experiences of supporting two-year-old children with identified SLCN. An insight into what it is like to be an early years practitioner at the time of the interview was demonstrated. The practitioners discussed the frustrations of supporting children in a time of austerity that has meant balancing the children's needs against some real challenges that, at times, have made it difficult to ensure that the children receive support. The practitioners discussed the ambiguity of the assessment tools pivotal in identifying children who may need support and shared the pressures they felt of accountability through Ofsted and the local authority. The practitioners appeared to express emotion at assessing children as underperforming without being able to reflect the child's abilities in other ways.

This study provided the opportunity for practitioners to engage in a dialogue that provided a platform for them to express their views and highlight the challenges that the role brings to them. The practitioners shared that they felt the current system of assessing children across any of the areas of learning within the EYFS (DfE, 2012b) reflected a deficit system that did not fully appreciate the individuality of children and the individual ways that children learn. The finding appeared to be the opposite intention of the original EYFS design (DCSF, 2008b). Ayla expressed this with the following quote that appeared to summarise the thoughts of all the practitioners:

> *The EYFS doesn't support any additional needs the same …autistic children …you know he is five but according to the EYFS he is like 8-20 because he can't put two words together, but you know he can run, he plays with small world or whatever, he loves being creative … but because this is what EYFS says, he is down there. I am so frustrated...oh god I'm getting mad* (P13:L2:A).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Roles and responsibilities within early years settings

Figure a demonstrating the different roles and responsibilities within an early years setting

Role Title	Minimum qualification level (Full and relevant)	Main Responsibilities	Speech, language and communication specific responsibilities
Early years practitioner: Key person	- 2	- Creating a secure relationship with key children. - Planning activities to support each child across all areas of development and early learning goals. - Assessing key children's development across the seven areas of development within the EYFS (DfE, 2012b). - Monitoring attainment levels of key children. - Completing a two-year-progress check if applicable. - Supporting children's hygiene skills. - Safeguarding children - Ensuring the environment is safe for children. - Targeted interventions for children with special educational needs. - Create parent partnerships to provide feedback on children's development. - Complete daily diaries of children's days (where appropriate). - Update learning journals.	- Assessing communication and language levels of children. - Implementing targeted interventions in response to the SENDCoP. - Monitoring progress of the targeted interventions. - Liaising with the SENDCo for advice and support. - Liaising with outside agencies (if appropriate) to support children.
Room Leader	1. 3	2. Coordinating planning for the room. 3. Adhering to health and safety legislation. 4. Ensuring that their key person assesses all children within the room. 5. Supervising staff.	9. Organising time to allow interventions to take place.

		6. Organising the layout of the room to ensure that it is simulating. 7. Supporting staff within the room. 8. Ensuring the room is safe for children to play in.	
Special educational needs Coordinator (SENDCo)	• 3	• Supporting children, parents and other staff members within the setting. • Completing paperwork, such as individual education plans. • Applying for funding. • Liaising with support services (LA, charities, external agencies). • Monitoring progress using the graduated response • Keeping up to date with legal responsibilities.	• Liaising with staff about individual children. • Helping to plan targeted interventions to support the child. • Monitoring progress of the targeted interventions. • Liaising with outside agencies (if appropriate) to support children. • Completing paperwork to support the practitioner and the child.
Safeguarding Officer	• 3	• Providing support and advice to staff for any concerns raised. • Managing referrals. • Ensuring that all staff receive training in safeguarding policy and procedure. • Ensuring that safeguarding knowledge is current.	
Early Years Manager/deputy manager	• 3	• Ensuring that all children are assigned a key person. • Informing Ofsted of any allegations of 'harm or abuse by any person living, working, or looking after children at the premises' (DfE, 2017a:17). • Informing Ofsted of any allegations made against the setting or members of staff. • Ensuring that child/adult ratios are maintained within the legal requirements (see section). • Monitoring the attainment levels of all children within the setting. • Liaising with external agencies.	• Supporting interventions through enhancing ratios where possible. • Liaising with external agencies. • Monitoring attainment levels of children with SLCN. • Monitoring interventions.

		• Responsible for staff recruitment. • Responsible for making sure that staff hold the relevant qualifications required to work in the setting at each level.	

Figure b: Demonstrating adult : child ratio levels in early years settings

	PVI (excluding Childminders)			Maintained		Childminder
	At least one person must hold a minimum full and relevant l3 & at least half of the staff in the room must hold a minimum full and relevant l2.					No minimum qualification level required
Working directly with the children	L2	L3-5	L6	QTS, EYPS EYTS or suitable L6	L3-L5	1:1
Under 1						
0-2 years	1:3	1:3	1:3			
2-3	1:4	1:4	1:4			
Under 5						1:3 (incl. under 1)
3-5	1:8	1:8	1:8	1:13	1:13	
5 and over				1:30		

Adapted from Department for Education (2017a)

Appendix B: Ethical approval from The University of Sheffield

The University Of Sheffield.

Downloaded: 21/04/2017
Approved: 26/10/2016

Nyree-Anne Nicholson
Registration number: 150111492
Human Communication Sciences
Programme: Human Communication Sciences

Dear Nyree-Anne

PROJECT TITLE: How does early years provision support the families and practitioners of young children identified two years old at with speech and language delays?
APPLICATION: Reference Number 009924

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 26/10/2016 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 009924 (dated 25/10/2016).
- Participant information sheet 1022227 version 11 (25/10/2016).
- Participant consent form 1022226 version 7 (25/10/2016).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Traci Walker
Ethics Administrator
Human Communication Sciences

Appendix C Excerpt of an interview P1:L1:M

Tuesday 8th May

Interviewer: so what sort of training have you had through that time?

Participant: erm, well I started at college, I did my NNEB and then since then I've done any courses that they would throw at me to be honest. I've done the Elklan speech and language course, erm, all sorts of the safeguarding, erm, risky play, outdoor play, I do like to go on courses [laughs] so anything…I do feel like…if you keep going and finding things out you just learn more as you go, erm and then obviously I have been doing my degree for the last two years… 3.2 Event sequence 7

4.17 **Interviewer**: ok so just thinking about the training you have had what sort of ..I mean you've talked about Elklan, can you just talk me through what did that involve?

Participant: erm, well I was on maternity erm, I was very bored and the Sure Start where I am, did it for free so I'd done the level 2 through work, erm and then went onto the level 3 and it was obviously just learning about speech and language development with children erm and then there was so many like little pieces of homework so you would have to observe the child and then put them where you think they were, erm, there was lots of talk of why they could be behind it turned out this little boy had a brain development issue in the end, erm so they could then pin point it but at the time we didn't know, that there was a lot of background on why they can be sort of underlying development issues so….so it was good! 3.2 Event sequence 8

Interviewer: Have you done any other sort of training for speech and language?

Participant: No, no…I would like to erm, I do find it really interesting and it amazes me how different children can be… even… we've had a lot of children that come from the same families and mums and dads have done exactly the same, yet their speech and language development can be different from each other's which is fun! 6. meta narrative 9

Interviewer: So thinking about that little boy at the minute did you try to,…did you try to erm, refer him at two, or did you just…

Participant: yeah, yeah because he was so far behind erm and there had been a lot of concerns at home… Grandma has him because he'd been taken away from his parents so Grandma was really really good at saying to us when he first came in that erm he doesn't speak erm, he still struggles with certain cups - he couldn't drink from a proper cup and things like that, so she'd already got a lot of concerns before they came to us and she's already got a lot of support in place because they're still under um, I think it was, I think it might have been the social workers, but they have a family around the team don't they for at risk children um, so she'd obviously voiced concerns to the health visitor and then they'd said wait until he went to nursery. So because she'd got all the background, the SENDCO was happy to say to speech and language that 'we had this child, that we have a lot of concerns' and they told her that because he was two they wouldn't come out …. 3. Event sequence 10

6.24 Interviewer: so what is the earliest age they would? Is it…

Participant: three [earliest age of child referral 4.C 11

Interviewer: Three?

Participant: yeah they said to call back when he was three and they would look at a referral then. 3. event sequence 12

Interviewer: Three?

Participant: yeah they said to call back when he was three and they would look at a referral then.

Interviewer: Did they explain the rationale for that?

Participant We get very limited information from the speech and language where we are erm, we're very lucky….., we've got a little boy in our older children who is under…(4. Public orientation 12)….we have to fight for her to come in and do sessions with him at nursery and they're just……whether they are under cuts the budgets and everything but they always say that they've got a lot on but (6. Meta narrative 13)…we have a lot on….I think it needs to come down to that the children who need them really… (5. Conceptual 14)

Appendix D: Example of reflective journals

08.05.18

I am scheduled to meet with my first participant this morning. I must admit to being a little nervous. I have booked a room and selected the smallest room that I could find that I know that I haven't taught the participant in an attempt to reduce any perceived power, however, regardless of where I chose I acknowledge this may still be the case. I have a meeting with the librarian at 10 am in the hope that I will be able to use the children's library for future interviews.

I have also considered what I should wear. Again in an attempt to minimise potential power imbalance, I have thought that if I do not wear my usual garb for teaching and select something a little more relaxed and indicative of what I might wear at home, this also might help towards creating a more relaxed attitude. I have fully charged my dictaphone but also intend to use my phone as a backup. I have printed off my consent forms. I think I am ready!!

08.05.18

I went to see the librarian in the children's library first. She was happy for me to use the space and said that she could reserve a table for me for each of the interviews. [redacted]

I ensured that I dressed in very casual wear which helped as it was a warm day. I wore open toed sandles and styled my hair in a different way to try and ensure there was a difference. I also took my lanyard with staff ID off and placed it in my bag so that it wasn't visable.

I had arranged to meet the participant in [redacted], the [redacted] coffee shop as I felt this began the meeting from a neutral point as we had not met here before. The arranged meeting time was 11.10 and the interview was due to start at 11.30. I thought that this allowed some time just to chat generally and to put the participant at ease. The participant was about ten minutes late arriving due to the traffic. I offered her a drink and we went and sat in the coffee shop court yard. It was an unusually warm day for the time of year and we had just had a bank holiday so we chatted over what we had both done over the weekend to help set the tone for the interview. We moved into the children's library at around 11.35 and as promised, a table had been reserved for us. The table was placed near a window looking out on to some grassed land and then onto the street. The windows were open and one of the [redacted] gardeners began to mow the grass at the exact moment we began the interview. The participant, whom I shall now attribute with the pseudonym of Mia from this point forward, got up and closed the window and we laughed about the timing of the lawnmower.

As we sat down I attempted to use my phone to record the interview as a back up. I spent a few minutes fiddling with the app and couldn't get it to work. Mia suggested that I use the camera instead, which I did. I should have checked I knew how to use the app however, I have used this app before and thought that I knew. Next time I will check I know how to use the app before trying to use it. This did however, cause us both to laugh and helped to ease the tension a little.

I went through the consent form and tried to be clear that Mia understood both the research and what the data collected would or possibly could be used for. I didn't fully introduce the topic at this stage as I didn't want to influence Mia.

Mia had bought pictures of different rooms within her setting that also had different members of staff on them that worked with Mia. I recognised a few of the staff members [redacted].

We spent a few moments briefly looking at the photos, although the staff were not mentioned until later in the interview. I explained that I did not have preset questions and I was hoping that the interview would take on more of a conversational tone. Mia nodded that she was happy with this format.

I began by asking an open statement that invited Mia to share her experiences of supporting a two-year-old child with communication and language needs. This worked initially as Mia launched into a specific example of a two year old boy that she had supported. Once this was finished I found that I needed to ask a few probing questions to spur the conversation further and encourage more reflection of Mia's experiences. Mia later commented that she hadn't thought about language in some of the discussion points that I had introduced and it helped her to reflect further and gain further insight into her past experiences. There were some surprises that I did find interesting based on the pilot study that was conducted last year. The first was Mia found the EYFS too strict in the ages and stages and this made assessing children difficult. This was completely different to the pilot where the participants stated that they felt the ages and stages too broad and it was therefore difficult to pin down developmental stages. I voiced this later in the interview when Mia commented that this difference could be attributed to the approach her setting took to assessment. Each child had to be fully secure in each stage before they progressed on, even if they were demonstrating skills in an older stage.

Throughout the conversation I was aware that I was asking questions but I felt that I did not have any other choice as the conversation would have stopped. This does go back to hermenuetics and the importance of the researcher understanding the phenomenon before beginning interviews to help tease out experiences from participants. At the end of the interview, after we had turned off the recorder, the participant again returned to the photos. She appeared proud of her setting as she talked about the

investments that had been made into the outdoor area. This was a little surprising as she had talked previously about the challenges of working in that particular setting in relation to the frustration that she sometimes felt at how she wasn't always able to freely do the things that she would like. This time she spoke wholly positively about the setting and her colleagues and it provided and interesting dialogue although not related to the research topic. We closed the interview and I realised later that I had not explained what would happen next; this is something that I need to do in an email a little later.

I walked with Mia [redacted] During the walk we talked about how difficult the recruitment process could be. A little later I receieved two more expressions of interest from other participants, I think Mia may have had a hand in persuading them to come forward!

Post script 17.05.18 After the interview I scanned the consent form and emailed it to Mia explaining what the next steps were. A copy of the interview was retained for tracking purposes.

*sections have been redacted to protect the anonymity of the participant.

Appendix E: Information letter for current research

Information Letter

My name is Nyree Nicholson and a research student studying with Lincoln University. This research study is part of my own studies at Lincoln University and not part of my professional capacity [redacted] I am investigating the experiences of practitioners have, when supporting children who have been identified by either the setting or the family, as having difficulty with speech and language development. Before you decide whether you would like to be involved, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the research question?

What are the experiences of practitioners of the identification and support of an additional language need in a two-year-old child?

What are you researching and why?

The aim of this research is to investigate the experiences early years practitioners go through when a concern has been raised about the child's speech and language development. This research will seek to investigate how the child's language development is supported and will explore the following aims:

- Investigate the experiences of early years practitioners working with two-year-old children, who are delayed in meeting the early learning goals in communication and language.
- Reflect upon the perspectives of early years practitioner experiences .

Who else is and can be involved?

I am inviting early years practitioners who have experience of two-year-old children identified as having difficulty in speech, language and

communication to take part in an interview to share their experiences of supporting the child.

What are you being asked to do?

I would like to conduct an interview that will take between thirty to sixty minutes to complete. I would like to audio tape the interview to make sure that these views are clearly represented.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). This study is for my own research and there is no expectation that you will take part. The research is independent from my professional duties within ******** University.

What if I agree to take part and then change my mind?

You can withdraw at any time up to the date of analysis (this date will be provided to you at the time of the interview) without any worries and you do not have to give a reason. Just contact me on the details provided in this letter and I will remove you from the study, without asking any questions. Any information collected will be destroyed and not used in the final report.

Are there any benefits to being involved?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will identify the processes that are in place in supporting families and settings of children identified with language and communication difficulties. By taking part in this research, you can share how it feels to be a parent with communication and language, and perhaps this research will improve services in the future.

What if I am concerned about the research study?

If you are unclear or concerned about any aspect of the research study, you can contact me directly with the contact details provided. If I am unable to

successfully address your concerns, you can contact my research supervisor on the details provided.

Contact details: [redacted]
Bridge House
Brayford Pool
Lincoln
LN6 7TS
01522 835745
[redacted]

What happens to the information that is collected?

All the information that is collected will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identifiable in any reports or publications; you will be anonymous as will all participants involved.

What happens to the results of the research study?

The results from the research will be used in a PhD thesis at the University. The results may also be used in journal and book publications; neither you as the parent, your child or the early years setting will be identifiable in any document. If any concerns emerge from the data, I will invite all those involved in the research, to a briefing to discuss these findings with you.

Which organisations are you associated with?

I am not associated with any organisation other than Lincoln University and the University that I am currently employed by: ******** University.

Who is funding this research?

This research forms part of a PhD thesis and is funded entirely by myself.

Who has approved this research study?

This project has been ethically approved via Lincoln University's Research Ethics Committee who monitors the application and delivery of the

University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University. Consent to approach students of ****** University was also gained through ******* University's ethics process.

Is there anything else I should know?

You can ask any questions that you may have at any time, by contacting me on the details below. I would be happy to arrange a time to come and see you or talk to you over the phone and answer any questions that you might have.

Contact details: Nyree Nicholson

Email: [redacted]

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and, if you decide to take part in the research, a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking part in the research.

Appendix F: Consent for Interviews for the current study

Participant Consent Form

Title of research project:	What are the experiences of practitioners of the identification and support of an additional language need in a two-year-old child.
Name of researcher:	Nyree Nicholson
Participant Identification Number for this project:	

	Please initial if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have been given the chance to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that any information that could be seen as a safeguarding concern, will be shared according to the Safeguarding board.	
I understand that my involvement is voluntary and that I am free to remove my involvement at any time, without giving any reason and without there being any come back. In addition, should I not wish to answer any question or questions, I am free to decline. The contact details of the researcher are: 1667502@students.lincoln.ac.uk	
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name or the setting's name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project, through a questionnaire or interview.	
If interviewed, I agree to the interview being audio taped. The audio will be transcribed, and I will be given a transcript of the recording to confirm that the transcript is an accurate representation of the interview. I will have the opportunity to remove anything that I am not happy with.	
I understand that all the information collected will be stored on a password encrypted hard drive and kept in a locked box when not in use, only the researcher will have access to the key.	

Name of Participant (*or legal representative*) Date Signature

_____ _____ _____

Name of person taking consent (*if different from lead researcher*) Date Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

_____ _____ _____

Lead Researcher Date Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix G: Tables to demonstrate recruitment and participant information

Figure c: Demonstrating where participants were recruited

	Expressions of interest	Information sent to the participant	Interview set	Interviewed	Confirmed transcript
University A	9	9	8	8	8
Social media	5	5	4	3	3
Professional contacts	4	4	3	3	4

Figure d: Detailing participants information

Participant number	**Pseudonym**	**Position at time of interview**	**Level of qualification**	**Location**	**Length of time in early years**	**Length of interview in minutes**	**Interview Code**
1	Mia	Practitioner	L5	1	15	36.02	P1:L1:M
2	Freya	Practitioner	L4	2	7	64:19	P2:L2:FR
3	Ferne	Practitioner	L 3	2	9		P3:L2:FE
4	Kailah	Practitioner	L5	1	4	42.48	P4:L1:K
5	Evie	Practitioner	L5	1	17	26.18	P5:L1:E
6	Megan	Practitioner	L6	1	8	44.29	P6:L1:M
7	Caurtney	Practitioner	L7	1	14	41.08	P7:L1:C
8	Keyleigh	Manager	L5	1	4	24.22	P8:L1:K
9	Chloe	SENDCo	L6	1	26	68:00	P9:L1:C
10	Ruby	Childminder	L6	2	37	22.34	P10:L2:R
11	Georgia	Childminder	L6	2	14	47.47	P11:L2:G
12	Poppy	Manager	L6	2	13-14	41:28	P12:L2:P
13	Ayla	SENDCo	L6	2	24	36.14	P13:L2:A
14	Corrie	Manager	L3	2	15	52:00	P14:L2:C
15	Aleigha	Practitioner	L5	1	3	25.03	P:15:L1:A

Interview code key: Participant number in order of interview; Location, initial of pseudonym (P1:L1:M).

Appendix H: Example of structured narrative framework analysis

Participant 1 since I was 16, so ……..15 years [working in early years], oh my goodness… AB

well I started at college, I did my NNEB and then since then I've done any courses that they would throw at me to be honest. I've done the Elklan speech and language course, erm, all sorts of the safeguarding, erm, risky play, outdoor play, ES

I do like to go on courses [laughs] so anything…I do feel like…if you keep going and finding things out you just learn more as you go, MN

well I was on maternity erm, I was very bored and the Sure Start where I am, did it for free so I'd done the level 2 [Elklan training] ES

through work, PO

erm and then went onto the level 3 and it was obviously just learning about speech and language development with children ES

erm and then there was so many like little pieces of homework so you would have to observe the child and then put them where you think they were, erm, there was lots of talk of why they could be behind SC

it turned out this little boy had a brain development issue in the end, erm so they could then pin point it but at the time we didn't know, that there was a lot of background on why they can be sort of underlying development issues so MN

….so it was good! MN

erm and then obviously I have been doing my degree for the last two years….ES

it amazes me how different children can be… even… we've had a lot of children that come from the same families and mums and dads have done exactly the same, yet their speech and language development can be different from each other's which is fun! SC

we only get told that the training directory has come to nursery PO

erm, the manager will suggest training but generally that's the things that we have to have, like your first aid your safeguarding erm, when we have our supervisions SC

we can say ones we would like, but it all comes down to costing SC

she's not always happy to send everybody on everything because it would cost her a fortune, MN

erm, personally I like to seek out training erm, like the Sure Start are really good for putting on courses erm, there's a couple of training providers around near us that will, every now and then promote themselves on like Facebook or Twitter things like that and through them you can generally find course and they will give you a discount if you take so many people from a setting erm, but its apparently quite hard. MN

you've got to try and find it [training]. SC

if we source the training we would have to pay for it……SC

we're paid minimum wage SC

Personally, I don't mind paying for it because I see it as a personal development. MN

If it then gets taken in and I start being used in that role at work, I think it would bother me because I've paid for that myself and then they're taking advantage of it. Erm, it's like I did my breast feeding support training and they now promote that at work but I did that on my own back when I had my little one but now all of sudden it's 'oh one of our staff has had this training' and then I get pulled into sort of support parents which I don't mind that's why I did the training but it ends up being a nursery thing, whereas its my personal thing erm, …I do like…I do like a bit of training though! [laughs]. MN

I can't do all of them I would like [training courses], I find a lot of training that I would like to do, erm, I generally…. will search them out and check the costing before I start hoping, hoping that I can go on them, MN

erm, sometimes… you can get a little discount if you're quite nice and then you will do them a favour, erm, and promote them somewhere else SC

but.. I can't….I'm trying to think if I've done any this year ……I haven't done any this year and last year, because the only one I actually needed through work was safeguarding and that's the only one they would pay for. And my money obviously recently has gone on, my books and everything for here erm, but it does come down to whether or not you want to do it and whether or not you can afford to do it. MN

Appendix I: Example of re-storied account

since I was 16, so ……..15 years [working in early years], oh my goodness…well I started at college, I did my NNEB and then since then I've done any courses that they would throw at me to be honest. well I was on maternity erm, I was very bored and the Sure Start where I am, did it for free so I'd done the level 2 Elkland speech and language course, and then went onto the level 3 and it was obviously just learning about speech and language development with children through work. There was so many like little pieces of homework so you would have to observe the child and then put them where you think they were, erm, there was lots of talk of why they could be behind. It turned out this little boy had a brain development issue in the end, erm so they could then pin point it but at the time we didn't know, that there was a lot of background on why they can be sort of underlying development issues.

[I've done] all sorts of the safeguarding, erm, risky play, outdoor play, I do like to go on courses [laughs] so anything…I do feel like…if you keep going and finding things out you just learn more as you go, it amazes me how different children can be… even… we've had a lot of children that come from the same families and mums and dads have done exactly the same, yet their speech and language development can be different from each other's which is fun!

we only get told that the training directory has come to nursery. The manager will suggest training but generally that's the things that we have to have, like your first aid your safeguarding erm, when we have our supervisions we can say ones we would like, but it all comes down to costing….she's not always happy to send everybody on everything because it would cost her a fortune. …you've got to try and find it [training] [but] if we source the training we would have to pay for it……personally, I don't mind paying for it because I see it as a personal development [but]….we're paid minimum wage. .. erm, personally I like to seek out training erm, I can't do all of them I would like [training courses], I find a lot of training that I would like to do, erm, I generally…. will search them out and check the costing before I start hoping, hoping that I can go on them. Like the Sure Start are really good for putting on courses erm, there's a couple of training providers around near us that will, every now and then promote themselves on like Facebook or Twitter things like that and through them you can generally find course and they will give you a discount if you take so many people from a setting erm, but its apparently quite hard. Sometimes… you can get a little discount if you're quite nice and then you will do them a favour, erm, and promote them somewhere else.

[Although it is frustrating…] If it then gets taken in and I start being used in that role at work, I think it would bother me because I've paid for that myself and then they're taking advantage of it. Erm, it's like I did my breast feeding support training and they now promote that at work but I did that on my own back when I had my little one but now all of sudden it's 'oh one of our staff has had this training' and then I get pulled into sort of support parents which I don't mind that's why I did the training but it ends up being a nursery thing, whereas its my personal thing erm, …I do like…I do like a bit of training though! [laughs]. I'm trying to think if I've done any this year ……I haven't done any this year and last year, because the only one I actually needed through work was safeguarding and that's the only one they would pay for. Obviously I have been doing my degree for the last two years, and my money obviously recently has gone on, my books and everything for here erm, but it does come down to whether or not you want to do it and whether or not you can afford to do it. P1:L1:M

Appendix J: Timelines to demonstrate the participants career progression


P14:L2:C
Had four children
Governor in children's school
When all children were in school, enrolled on NNEB course, aged 29
Began working in first position.
Worked in series of temporary positions including special schools
Took a job in the current position within the school nursery
Left to go to Sure Start in 2003
Left in 2006 to go back to the previous position within a Sure Start Nursery as a manager.
P:15:L1:A
Working in office type roles
Had three children
Began to volunteer in current setting 2016
Taken on by setting in 2016
Got promoted at second setting
Began level 2 2016
Began Foundation degree 2017
Completed Foundation degree 2019
P13:L2:A
Moved to the UK
Did level 1
Did level 2
Did level 3
Had a child
Took a three year career break
Went back into practice
Changed to current setting 2012
Promoted to room leader
Promoted to SENDCO
Begain Foundation degree in 2014
Began Ba Hons in 2017
Compelted Ba Hons in 2018
P10:L2:R
Had two children, partner left so applied to be a childminder
Started foundation degree 2006
Had another child
Completed foundation degree
Began Ba Hons 2011
Completed Foundation degree 2012
P9:L1:C
Worked for the public in control rooms as supervisor
Had first child
Took a career break
Had second child
Became a full-time mother
Began attending toddler groups
Volunteered for children's centre
Became part of the parent board
Set up toddler group
Moved house
Began volunteering at preschool July 2014
permenently by the preschool January
Began foundation degree 2015
Began Ba Hons 2017
Promoted to SENDCO 2018
Completed Ba Hons 2018

Appendix K: Example of thematic grid

Demonstrating an example of the thematic grids used for analysis

Tools for identification	EYFS	EYFS tick list	Like ticking off ELG	
		Good to identify a delay		
		Data driven		
		Observations		
		Benchmarking		
		Challenges	Best fit	
			Ambiguity	
			Subjectivity	
			Ridged	
			tick box	
			All children develop differently	
			Single perspective for identification	Practitioner can over represent child's ability due to the knowledge of the child
			use differs depending on setting	
			Difference between what is recorded on the observation and the overarching tracking	
			Ages and stages too broad	
			Not appropriate with SEND or EAL children	
			Does not provide a true reflection of the child's abilities	
			not used properly	
			Data not always accurate No real training offered for how to use it	

Main theme	sub themes				
Child	Parents/family	Positive	Parental engagement		
			Acceptance		
		Challenging	Lack of engagement	Setting	
				External agencies	
			Understanding and expectation of langauge development	based on other siblings/children in the family	
				the child, cannot see the problem	
				Inflating childs ability	
				under representing child's ability	to claim benefits
			Denial		
			Influence from other family members	grandparents	
			Langauge barrier	Have some dual langauge staff	
				Use google translator	communication is difficult
			Parent setting relationship	Lack of respect for practitioner	trust in school more
		Family history	Other family members with additional S and L needs siblings		
	Gender	Boy Girl	Prevelence factors		
	Impact	Behaviour	Frustration Anger		
		Other areas of development	Later attainment School ready	reading Maths	
		Social development	PSED		
	Key worker	Relationship with the child			
		Experience, qualifications, Training			
	Other additional needs	Related or non related			
	Reason for delay	Dummy and Bottle Shy Factors within the family EAL Parents not promoting independence Can be an indicator of other conditions			
	Vingette (individual stories of specific children)				

Appendix L: Example of thematic analysis

: Learning from experience thematic analysis

Participant	Children	Community of practice	Learning from practice
Aleigha *(P:15:L1:A).*	[do qualifications make a difference] because there are a lot of things that I've learnt just from being here that I would never thought of even sometimes just the way that I do things, I do them but I never realised why or what an effect it can have erm and I think a lot of the time people just goes by sort of their experience and it's it seems to be very much especially in our setting with some of the staff 'well this is the way we've always done it, it's always worked up until now' so whereas I'm not …..and I think because I am largely put with the the children with extra needs I can't be like that because it doesn't …. every child that I have has got different needs a different requirements and it doesn't always work so what may have worked brilliantly with one child immediately I think 'ah that's not going to work so let's try something else' and I don't think everyone is quite…they don't approach things the same way they just approach every child with the same approach and if it doesn't work they just pass it on to somebody else. because it was picked up quite early and it was commented on quite early that I build up a really good rapport with these children [children identified with additional needs] erm specifically first happened with the little boy that has severe autism and it was commenced on immediately that I built up a good report with him quite quickly where as nobody else as awful as this sounds his own his own key person said [sighs] 'I just can't deal with him' that was it I am and erm quite often that was the response from everybody	but that's likely to do the experience of the children that I've had had and also to do with the experience with other colleagues that I've had as well which have not been ideal	
Kailah P4:L1:K	Whereas I think if it once you've got that experience of working with a number of children and that you're given a number of different approaches, You can kind of start this because of the experience you can start doing a few things that you've previously done		I kind of …I don't really think it [qualifications] means a lot. It's …..I do think it's solely down on experience because as we've said there's not specific training within any kind of qualification toward that's aim towards language. So, a level 5 might never have experienced a child with speech language and what's to say they would know what to do because there isn't on any of those courses, you don't learn how to make referrals you take and how erm, how to go about in a situation like so to have that experience.
Evie *(P5:L1:E)*	so I think if you, so the more experienced you are the better it is the easier it is for you to identify as well. Like cause I didn't I wouldn't have had a clue on some of it and I see it now that there are still particularly now working with babies like and I know you wouldn't necessarily see them as having speech and	well I know I know my manager has because she's been doing it for 40 years and so, she knows the difference between a child that is delayed, and a child isn't, but I don't	

	language difficulties but there's things you notice that I notice now that I think 'oh you going to have to keep an eye on that' But because of the experience I had downstairs like with the other children it made you think 'oh he didn't do that when he was a baby but nobody noticed' .	know where that everybody would have that behind them if that makes sense.	
Ayla	oh, my Polish is excellent now as well yes, I learn so much, I must say that actually all of us in the setting we all know some Polish		
Megan *(P6:L1:M).*		that was all basic that is, and then you move here and its like when I say experience you do it all in setting instead of like your institute, I would have thought I would have learnt it. Like my mate finished before me because I had [named her own child] so she'd already gone on and got work and what not when I finally got work, she were talking to me and it were sounding like foreign to me and I didn't have a clue what she were talking about until I actually got a job and then worked with it and like speech and language I didn't have a clue, ought, you know I felt really silly, that	I feel confident [in identifying levels of language development in children]…I feel well its experience sometimes isn't it. When you work with it for so long you just pick up on it naturally but erm, yeah there's been no other training all the way from one to six, it's just been an additional.
Chloe P9:L1:C		I suppose [sighs] it's experience and obviously managers work there a lot you know her experience is a lot more than mine. So, we do discuss things and obviously you know, think well we need to put a bit of intervention in, we get parent consent to do like someone to one work on things	
Freya P2:L2:FR		think the experience does help and obviously and [other participant] knows a lot more than I do about like the theory side of it and stuff like that but then the experience has helped me come on a lot compared to when I was first went into it after college.	
Corrie P14:L2:C		for me yeah I really believe that [learning from practice]	

Appendix M: Example of thematic grid

Example of thematic grid

Main theme	Sub theme	Sub theme	Sub theme	Sub theme
Assessment Collaboration				
Assessment Data				
Assessment for identification	Assessment for Identification Challenges	EAL		
		External support for Identification		
		Parents		
		Participants		
		Tools for assessing	EYFS	Tick list
				Too broad
				Over reliance
				Open to interpretation
				Not specific enough
				No specific training
	Practitioner awareness			
	Process of identification	Factors		
		Age of children		
Strength of assessment				
Assessment by keyperson				
Tools for assessment	EYFS			
	Makaton			
	Mary Sheridan			
	Wellcomm			
Types of assessment	Observation			
	Baseline			
	Two year progress check			
Assessment Development Trackers				

Appendix N: Step by step process of the analysis process

Step 1 Transcribed the interviews

Step 2: Went through each transcript and extracted each child story and each participant story from each interview.

Stage 3: Re-storied the individual children stories

Stage 4: Took each story and plotted it against the narrative framework

Stage 5: Noted down points and issues as I went through

stage 6: Identified the total number of children discussed from the examples in each interview.

Stage 7: Identified the gender and additional needs of the children within the stories

Stage 8: Inductive (check upgrade for wording)

Stage 9: Using Nvivo I Set up class classification to include for participant to include:

- Length of time in service
- Level of qualification
- Area that the participant comes from: location 1, 2
- Position within the setting

Stage 10: Nvivo set up cases and classifications to aid with the analysis of the data

Stage 11: Went through each interview and created further themes (in addition to the inductive themes) for each point by going through each transcript line by line.

Stage 12: Went through each of the themes to see if the data needed to be moved to a different theme and if the theme required changes or if it needed to be deleted.

Stage 13: Went back through each interview to backwards check for themes.

Stage 14: Using story boarding, I set themes and identified the themes against some links to literature

Stage 15: I began to feel like I was loosing the storied elements and so I went back to the participants personal stories.

Stage 16: I restoried them in the same way that I did for the child storied.

Stage 17: I plotted them against the narrative framework

Stage 18: I looked for patterns in the way that participants began their early years careers,

Stage 19: I created a timeline for each participant where possible to look for similarities and differences.

Stage 20: I went to create tables within Nvivo to see if looking at the data in a different format would help create more insight. The MAC version of Nvivo doesn't allow for this and the data is not compatible with Windows so I couldn't swap formats. Instead, I took each theme and each node and transferred them into Excel. I checked the coding and realised that some of the points could be moved to alternative nodes.

Stage 21: I looked for sub-themes within excel to help make sense of the data.

Stage 22: I transferred the data into tabled form into Word to aid further clarity.

Stage 23: I went back to the child stories and looked for further patterns. I took each child storied example and copied it into Excel, I then gave each child a pseudonym to help the reader to connect with the child.

Stage 24: I took each child and looked for the point of the story and other factors- what was the child's primary area of need, what was the point of the story. I then took the data and created tables to help make sense of the data to fully utilise the stories.

Stage 25: Using the conceptual framework, I examined the findings using a conceptual framework.

Appendix O: Email to invite participants to check analysis interpretation

On 29 Apr 2019, at 14:28, Nyree-Anne Nicholson

Re: PhD
[redacted]

I wanted to ask you if you might be interested in having a look at the way that I have analysed our interview from last year to see if you agree with the themes that I came up with? We could do this any way that would work for you, so over the phone, email or face to face? I just want to check that I am interpreting the data in the way that it was meant and to increase validity. I understand that now is a busy time, so if you are interested any time that would work for you would be great, but if you are not interested that's fine to.

Best wishes

Nyree

□

From: [redacted]
Sent: 29 April 2019 15:02
To: Nyree-Anne Nicholson
Subject: Re: PhD

Hi Nyree,

Not a problem. I'm happy to help. I could come up approx 1pm thurs or fri if that suits you?

[redacted] x

Sent from my iPhone

On 29 Apr 2019, at 14:28, Nyree-Anne Nicholson <nyree-anne.nicholson@*******.ac.uk> wrote:

Hi [redacted]

are you available next Thursday? Or I am [redacted] on Wednesday this week if that is any easier?

Thanks again

Nyree

*information redacted to protect the participants anonymity.

Appendix P: Ethical approval from the University of Lincoln

	participants approve, I would then send them the transcript and follow the procedure highlighted above. The data collected has helped me to develop my research aims and as such is an integral part of the research process.
13 Has ethical approval already been obtained from that body? Please note that such approvals must be obtained before the project begins.	**Yes** x **(Please append documentary evidence to this form.)** **No** ☐ **(If no, please explain why below.)**

APPLICANT SIGNATURE

I hereby request that the School of Education Research Ethics Committee review this application for the research as described above, and reply with a decision about its approval on ethical grounds.

I certify that I have read the University's Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Humans and Other Animals (which can be found online here: http://visit.lincoln.ac.uk/C11/C8/ResearchEthicsPolicy/Document%20Library/Research%20Ethics%20Policy.pdf).

24.11.17

Applicant signature **Date**

Nyree Nicholson

Print name

FOR STUDENT APPLICATIONS ONLY
Academic Support for Ethics

Academic support must be sought from your mentor prior to submitting this form to the School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught applicants should obtain approval from their tutor or an academic member of staff nominated by the Department.

Postgraduate Research applicants should obtain approval from their Director of Studies.

I (the undersigned) support this application for ethical approval.

11

24 November 2017

Academic / Director of Studies signature | Date

Dr Helen Childerhouse

Print name

For completion by the Chair of the School of Education Research Ethics Committee

Please select ONE of A, B, C or D below.

X☐ A. The School of Education Research Committee gives ethical approval to this research.

☐ B. The School of Education Research Committee gives *conditional* ethical approval to this research.

14 Please state the condition (including the date by which the condition must be satisfied, if applicable).	

☐ C. The School of Education Research Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research but refers the application to the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for higher level consideration.

15 Please state the reason.	

☐ D. The School of Education Research Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research and recommends that the research should *not* proceed.

16 Please state the reason.	

Signature of Chair of School of Education Research Committee (or nominee)

12th April 2018

Signed | Date

13

Appendix Q: To demonstrate the extracted child stories

Child 3(P4:L1:K)

There was also another child that stands out in my mind. And we tried to refer for speech language because a lot of the sounds weren't there, he was talking to you a lot but a lot of the time couldn't understand because he just couldn't form the sounds, beginning and end of words, erm, and we erm, filled out what the checklist forms and he was… I think who it was displaying about a year below in the sounds that he could make you know with what with speech and we attempted to erm,

whose once was referred by to parents used to display some man aggressive behaviour towards staff and children erm, and as well as erm, not wanting to become involved with their own group activities became although he was very social in when it was free play he would choose to play with the children things he wasn't very confident in group situations. Erm, whereas once the support was there he enjoyed joining him for example with the book that was given that the children joined in with he joined in with it erm, and it did seem to pick up his confidence. Once that was established again he was able to verbalize a little bit more that he was frustrated or he he could come and tell us who had done what. I mean he would very much look to somebody to support him with it once he could verbalize. Erm so I would say that it does impact development largely because they can't communicate their frustrations, that's their only way of venting.

I can't think of the word… referred to on speech language and as I was in a setting wouldn't take it.

the setting did refer, and we're told that they [SLT services] didn't need to see him. Erm, so we are [sic had] conversations on the phone obviously parents had given consent for us to go ahead and do, erm, but yeah we were told that we didn't need any additional support that he'd be fine to continue supporting him in setting and that they didn't need to see him.

we said to the parent 'I think the best bet next bet is for you to phone up and say we've got a child you want to self-refer'. They did the like online interview on phone sorry on the phone interview with her and they saw him within two weeks.

So thankfully we had the parents on board with it.

In that case they didn't [accept a referral]….from us, but they did with parents [accept a referral for a two year old child]

but yeah like I say he was taken by dad to the meeting and returned back to nursery the same day he came with lots of different pieces of paper with what we could support, and they did come into setting to talk to us about how we could support the child.

Then they went in and observed the child erm and erm then then they would kind of and go over, so there was a lot of sheets. we were obviously in the room, but I don't think they ever really did [model S& L strategies]. It was literally just an observation to see what I was doing within the room.

they came already with [resources].

well it's very much isn't it, almost like they kind of…. they've came, come with it and not gone on what they feel should be needed at same time. But again I suppose I don't know whether they had a collection of in their bag and got out what they thought the needed, I don't know …I don't feel like as a practitioner with all the children collectively that I've seen with this speech language support that they ever spend enough time with the child to really know …..they don't they don't know the child they're very much, erm, they see isn't that snippet of kind of 10 minutes that the sit and observe that child isn't …..is never comfortable around them so…..

They didn't whilst we were [do activities with the child] there they didn't sit down and do any activities with the child, it was just an observation of how child was within the room.

Yes, they erm, did sit down [to ask for the practitioners input], we said like I say because we tried to refer have we had sat down and done a checklist on we'd gone, I think the age the child was the age and the age bracket below on the checklists, erm, and obviously we went through what we had observed and what we didn't observe and everything to go through that. And again, where he was on our assessment sheets for speech language with the EYFS.

like I say its more they would, they would kind of look at erm, the assessment you have on the child as to where the child sat and point you they are more for pointing in my experience pointing in the right in the direction of where to go and what to do next. Erm, I don't necessarily think….like I say ….they did give us these checklist

sheets to fill in….. said that this was going back years ago erm, but when so far as I'm aware of it they do tend to just say ‘this is where we should go next or what we should do next’

There was a book [left by SLT] I can’t think of what it was called and it was all to do erm with the sounds so when you were go through and it was somebody licking a lolly pop you'd get them all to lick which we then kind of turned….it was fun enough for all children to do and obviously we didn't want to take that child away, so we tended to do it whilst they all sat down together and they all joined in erm, so they kind of just went through and supported that erm and then asked us what we'd seen any improvement and they did coming quite regularly to then support the child after they'd seen him.

no, it was just an it's just a pack kind of given to us they said this is what it is this is what we would like you to do. But that was no erm, it's hard isn't it because when given something you can be told to do it, but you don't necessarily get the questions until you've tried you've attempted to kind of do it with the children. But erm, yeah it was just come of verbalised this is what we would like you to do which obviously we put down at the time into IEP’s and erm, did on a….. well whenever the child was in erm.

some of them [the lists were based on the EYFS] yeah. Erm, yeah. I would say a lot of them like I say if they did kind of relate to trying to think of an example of other things that were on that. But it was it was some things were specific like they say that ‘S’ sound and do they like do they go clicking when talking was another one that was on there are about do they click or the sounds coming from the front of the tongue at the back part that that was what the aim was to find them out trying to I can't think of what it was called but it was [early years team] as a tool.

it was something separate it was erm, something that was given to us by [local early years team] I believe. Erm, and that was over erm when we, so this was kind of a couple of years before but speech language said that they were things that they would observe, erm, I can’t even think of what it is called. Erm ….I could find out…..it was a checklist and say it had it was pretty much the same age brackets as the EYFS looks at, but it was erm, very much things wasn't just speech related it was obviously anything to mouths so whether they were still had a bottle, whether they had a dummy comforter whether they erm, chewed food erm and or things like that as well as then looking at the sounds they make. And erm, they can say one word two words when they speak with purpose was it a made-up word or, whether the words …

very much like it was like we didn't know the child and we was making some think up that wasn't that basically, it was kind of quite hard to swallow though sometimes it's the opposite way round isn't it that they don't listen to a parent. But when another professional kind of speaks up.

probably think he was a summer baby so he probably about three and a half then but he was due to start school in September and like I say, instantly because like I say because he was starting school it was he was given his support erm and it did help him

he potentially wouldn't have struggled with his behaviour and his emotions for that whole year [if his communication and language needs were supported earlier].

It's hard isn't it to kind of stomach that its ok for that child to be frustrated for a year and not be able to verbalize but it it's almost like…. it's almost like they pass I feel they've passed the buck ‘its ok cos nurseries can deal with that when schools can't’ it's that kind of…. yeah feeling.

Appendix R: Identification – number of words

Identification theme: number of words a child can say at two-years-old

Practitioner	Number of words
Mia P1:L1:M	I think 300 is a lot [of words to know by two years old] but I have had parents before make lists and its amazing how many words they can put down on to a list that just they've heard that they can think of their child saying. So, I think 300 sounds like a good number, at say if you if you said between two and two and half and you gave them a little bit of a bracket…. yeah I think that seems quite low [50 words a child should know by two- years-old], compared to the 300, I don't think that's a very big number but..
Ferne P3:L2:FE	well, they normally say 8-20 is one word, erm, 16-26 is developing two words erm, but for a two-year-old, its more, I think its more 16-26, to the 22-36 bracket erm, ……yeah, I would say about that bracket. starting off at two and then developing ….its about being able to create a small sentence. 2 erm,…….erm…….I've never really been asked that before [how many words a two-year-old child should know],…..you never really think about it do you? ……I just really talk to a child……yeah its….actually when you talk to a child you don't realise how many words in which they know, how many words… yeah, that's what I mean you don't, you don't exactly know they know the minimum or they know more than 50 because you just generally talk to them, you don't count the words they say.
Kailah P4:L1:K	for a just turn just the two-year-old. Erm, …..about, erm……. forty [words a child of two-years-old should know]? hmm yeah that's quite a surprise and I wonder whether I was going a little but high on 40 for a just turned two year old but yeah [sigh] I think that's…… again it depends it depends on the kind the background of the child and how much the child is encouraged to have a voice and how have that child spoken to as well because a lot of erm, people tend to speak to the child with baby talk and when they shorten sentence to kind of almost um make it easier erm, to be understood don't they rather than speaking in a conversation that you would have with somebody that was olde,r I don't know. I think 200….. yeah for just turned two year old but say that's just about turned three that's eh….
Evie P5:L1:E	50 words isn't a lot, is it? Or is it a lot? I don't know…. That doesn't seem like a lot for a two-year-old. see I've heard that [the average words a two-year-old knows is around 300], that's what shocked me about the 50. How can you say 50s enough But that's there supposed to have 300. see I think 50 you should be concerned like, cos that's not a lot is it? they can all sound the same as well. So, in my eyes it's like you should be looking at the sound of the word and as well like you can find 50 words that all sound the same. so, have they actually learnt anything? Because that just changing the letters not the sounds.
Megan P6:L1:M	eggh! I'm not sure I can't say off the top of my head…… I don't know [how many words the child can say] ….about 10?
Caurtney P7:L1:C	..so it might be like two hundred or something? Or is that at year one? I can't remember. I have got it written down somewhere. I think it's about 200 and also, I also find that sometimes they just repeat what you've said. yeah uses simple sentences
Georgia P11:L2:G	so, their hearings fine but they do point, that they are babbling, they should have a few words by two, ...I don't off the cuff know [how many words a child should be able to say at two years old], I usually do because I have me ECaT list with me erm, but when I used to go and do it was a tick off between, 10, 20. 30 words so you start with that and you start with the parents and I think you ask the parents
Alya P13:L2:A	oh, my goodness I actually don't know 20, 30 I don't know, I really don't know

Appendix S: Strategies used internally to support children

Table to show strategies used internally to support children

	Teddy Talk	Visuals	Modelling	Objects of reference	Over talking	Sabotaging play	SLT Sheets	Purchased services	Elkland	ECaT	Makaton	Stories for talking	Groups	Phonics	Parent stay and play	Routines	Flash cards	Experiences	Signing and Rhymes	Repetition	First Call	Turn taling
Mia		✔	✔										✔				✔					
Ferne		✔		✔									✔		✔				✔	✔		
Freya																						
Kailah		✔											✔									
Evie													✔									
Megan													✔								✔	
Caurtney									✔		✔							✔				
Keyleigh			✔										✔								✔	
Chloe							✔							✔					✔		✔	✔
Ruby																						
Georgia										✔			✔						✔			
Poppy						✔	✔		✔			✔										
Ayla	✔																✔					
Corrie					✔					✔			✔			✔						
Aleigha											✔											

Appendix T: To demonstrate stage 14 of the analysis